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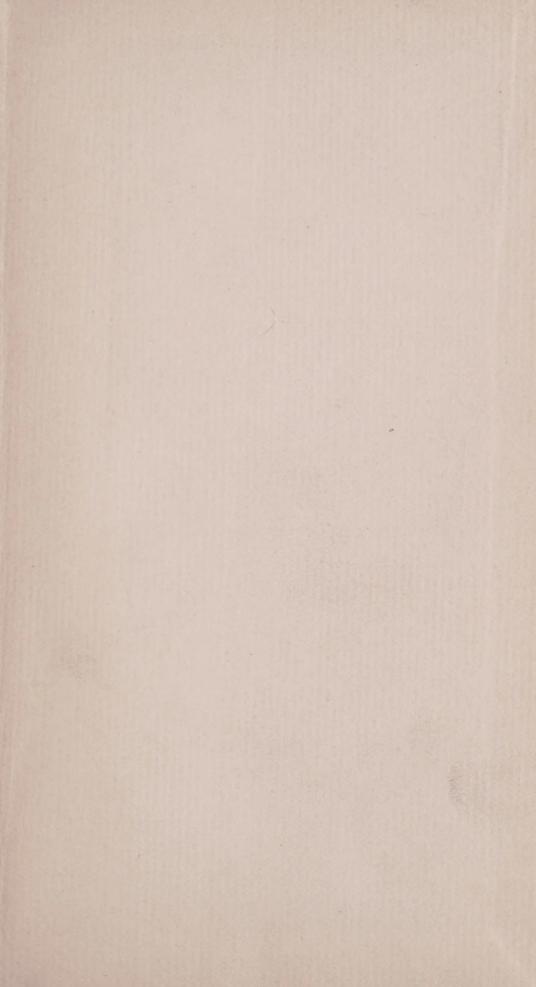
IN A SILENT WORLD



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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.





IN A SILENT WORLD THE LOVE STORY OF A DEAF MUTE

By the Author of "Views of English Society," &c.



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PREFACE

THIS is a simple story of a woman's love.

No mysterious plot is unravelled in its pages, neither will any sparkling dialogues be found in them, therefore the reader in search of the sensational or purely amusing had better lay it aside at once.

It merely seeks to depict the introspection of a soul, pent up, prison-like, between the walls of a great affliction, whose only mode of expressing its emotions was by the pen, and for whom not a few of life's manifold problems remained unsolved.

CHAPTER THE FIRST

With no language but a cry.

TENNYSON.

WHAT is sound? That is the question which has been perplexing me ever since my thoughts first took shape. Does it convey an impression to the ear, and thus communicate itself to the brain, as seeing does to the eye?

How well I remember the dawn of the idea that I was in some way different from other people; it flitted through my mind in a vague, undefined manner, for I can hardly be said to have had any thoughts at all, nothing more than a sort of inner-consciousness, and the objects surrounding me were merely images presented to my sight without name or

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meaning; they were familiar to me from the fact that I was born and reared amidst them, but it was only long afterwards that I acquired the power of describing them.

The first distinct recollection that I have shows me a beautiful Spring day. My mother and I were seated on a bench outside the dining-room window of our home amongst the Cotswold Hills. Field after field gradually sloped down before us till they joined the straight Roman road, which ran like a ribbon through the plain below; a soft haze shrouded the towers of the cathedral, which lay in the valley on our left, and half concealed a more distant town some six or seven miles in front of us; but the sun shed a flood of warmth and light over the spot where we were sitting, and seemed to kindle into life the early flowers on the bank at our feet.

We had not been there very long before a friend of my mother's arrived in a pony-carriage. There was nothing unusual in this, as she occasionally visited us. She alighted, put her hand into my mother's, and their lips moved. I sat

quietly watching them, and I moved my lips also, just because they moved theirs.

Presently they pointed upwards, and my eyes, following the direction of theirs, saw a bird mounting to the sky from a field near. I afterwards knew that it was a lark, and that it is the habit of that bird to sing as it rises. They laid their heads on one side, as I have since observed that people do when they are listening intently, and I suppose the imitative mood must have been strong upon me that day, for I laid my head on one side and looked up too.

Suddenly, to my astonishment, my mother clasped me in her arms, and kissed me over and over again, moving her lips very quickly. It was only long afterwards that I understood she had mistaken this for my first sign of hearing, for which she had been watching anxiously almost ever since my birth.

I think it must have been on the same night when she put me to bed, she made me kneel down, folded my little hands together, and again her lips moved, and again I tried to imitate her. I believe I must have known dimly that this was

my first "voiceless prayer." The motion of a hidden fire was stirring my soul, and although but a child, I was conscious of some want unsatisfied, some deep desire unfulfilled.

Hitherto the games which had exercised my limbs, and the toys which had amused me, had been sufficient, but from this day began that silent questioning which has never departed from me, but which, thanks to my mother's infinite patience, is no longer unanswerable.

I began to know by degrees what joy, and sorrow, and anger meant. I loved and I hated with an intensity only known to those who have not natural outlets for their feelings; but that divine spark which men call conscience, or a standard of right and wrong, was beginning to assert itself within me, and naughtiness was almost invariably followed by penitence. But at this time, although surrounded by all that parental affection could lavish upon me, I was utterly forlorn in my loneliness.

Imagine yourself set down in the midst of a universe where every object is nameless, and where no one has the

power of conveying a single word to you, or of satisfying the cravings of that mental life which, in healthy children, should keep pace with bodily growth. When I look back upon that period, it is small wonder to me that, in the ignorance of the Middle Ages, the deaf and dumb were classed with imbeciles and lunatics.

However, a better state of things was at hand.

My mother had taken great pains to inculcate order in all I did, believing it to be the first step to my education. My toys were kept with extreme neatness; each had its appointed place in a cupboard set apart for that purpose. I knew in an instant if they had been tampered with, and bitterly resented it.

One morning, on going to fetch my doll as usual, I found a piece of paper pasted across its forehead. It bore what I afterwards knew was the word "doll." My indignation was great. In tears and anger I tore off the obnoxious label, my mother soothing me as best she could; but I was not to be consoled. The prevailing idea in my al-

most blank mind had been rudely shaken, and my wrath was still greater the following morning when I discovered that my doll again had the offending paper on its forehead, this time stuck on more firmly than before. The little pantomime of the previous day was repeated. With many sobs, I washed it off; but I could not play with my doll. I put her to bed again, pretending that she was ill. You will readily believe that I thought a great deal about it all day, and I think I was hardly surprised when I found the label again there on the third morning.

This time I neither cried nor was angry, for I began to perceive some motive in the persistent repetition, and I remember looking earnestly in my mother's face with dumb inquiry. She moved her lips, and with a flash of inspiration I connected the word she uttered with that on the forehead of my doll. I nodded, I laughed, I danced with joy. I was too young to gauge the terrible gap which separated me from others. I only knew intuitively that somehow henceforth things would

be different, and that a way of holding converse was opened to me. I fetched other toys and pointed to them and to my doll, and then my mother took a pretty box out of her work-basket and shook out a number of little labels, bidding me, as well as she was able, to observe the difference; she placed each upon the object for which it was prepared, then she gave me a pencil and paper and taught me how to form the letters myself.

Every morning my lessons were continued. The little box was constantly replenished with fresh labels, and soon I had pictures given to me with trees, churches, and animals, all bearing their proper names.

It is needless to go through the details of the course of instruction which was thus begun; all who have had the training of the deaf and dumb are fully acquainted with it; and I afterwards learned that when the sad truth of my infirmity forced itself upon my mother, she made herself mistress of the best methods in order to be my teacher.

I found it easier to acquire nouns and

verbs than to understand the adjectives and adverbs qualifying them; but here again my mother's intelligence came to my assistance, and constant suiting of the action to the word at last brought me into relation with them.

My sentences were at first brief and incomplete, but in time I mastered the difficulty sufficiently to obtain all the information I wanted to have about my surroundings.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

Ill life to sit lamenting for what we may not have. — The Story of the Volsungs.

FOUND that people had two names, an individual or Christian name, and a family or surname — that my own name was Evelyn and that of my family Sylvestre.

"Evelyn Sylvestre!" I think it looks pretty written. I have often wondered how it sounds. It must be pleasant to hear your name on the lips of those you love; to be able to respond when you are called. It is one of my many privations that I can only go when touched or beckoned to. Even a dog is better off in that respect than I am.

My father was Christian Sylvestre. He was a thoughtful man, thin, and rather above the middle height, but with a slight stoop which made him look shorter than he really was; he had a fine forehead, to which premature baldness lent additional expansiveness, and deep-set hazel eyes, so bright that I used to think they looked like lamps shining from under their shaggy brows; a well-shaped nose with very sensitive nostrils. About his mouth and chin I cannot write so accurately, because they were concealed by a brown moustache and beard. He looked very old to me, and he certainly was some years my mother's senior, but it was more the life he led than the years he numbered which aged him.

He was absorbed in books. His study always seemed to me like sacred ground; and though I was permitted to spend a great deal of time there—no doubt because I was mute—I preferred being with my mother usually, because it evidently fidgeted him if I changed my seat too frequently, or touched any of his precious books.

This only applies to my early child-hood. There came a time when he cheerfully gave me access to his little library, when he even left off toiling

over his papers to scribble little scraps of conversation with me — for he never took kindly to the finger alphabet — and he would brighten up whenever he saw me with a favourite author of his own in my hand. My mother was more than once betrayed into expressing the wish that I could hear him read. I understood from her that he read with great pathos and expression, and a delicate sense of humour.

He could rarely be tempted to go far from his own little domain. When weary of reading or writing, he used to walk in the immediate vicinity of the house; and I can see him now lifting his hat to let the cool breeze play across his temples as he stopped to gaze at the extensive view which spread out like a panorama before him.

The house in which we lived, and much of the adjoining land, besides a few scattered farms, belonged to him, and had been in his family for some generations. His income was more than sufficient to supply our moderate wants, and to relieve him from what, to him, would have been the unpleasant

necessity of applying himself to any profession or business.

He had received a university education, and had read for Holy Orders, but changed his intention, and never presented himself for ordination, partly from some scruple about subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles, and partly from grave doubts as to his fitness for parochial work. After a long vacation, spent with the rector of a large and poor parish, he abandoned all idea of entering the Church, declaring that the responsibility was more than he dared to undertake.

He had great modesty and simplicity in dealing with his fellow-men; it was only to his dearest friends that he revealed himself as an earnest student, and a deep and original thinker.

Now and then he contributed a powerfully-written article to one or other of the leading magazines; but they were always anonymous.

He and my mother were first cousins, and it was no doubt the familiar intercourse afforded by their relationship which brought about their marriage.

They were a great contrast to one another. She seemed to derive all her characteristics from the opposite side of her family, who were Quakers. Perhaps it was this which imparted so great a steadfastness to her. She never failed to carry out all she undertook. Nothing ever diverted her from her purpose, when once she had convinced herself that she was right in pursuing it. She was the most tranquil person I ever knew. Her tranquillity did not arise from any lack of feeling - of this I am positive - but from having early learnt the lesson of self-control. One could read strength in her calm grey eyes and resolute, though tender, lips. She was admirably suited to bear with her husband's variable moods, soothing him when he was restless or irritable, cheering him when depressed, and encouraging his literary efforts.

It was only quite by degrees that he began to make a companion of me. In fits of abstraction, he would even forget that I could not converse with him. He was very delicately organised, and an occurrence slight to other people

would be sufficient to disturb his equanimity for days together.

Harsh noises distracted him. I remember that once, when I was very little, I was in his study; he was writing as usual, and I was drawing pictures on my slate. Suddenly I became aware that he was looking at me; he appeared to be displeased. I did not know why; so, after pondering over the matter for a minute or two, I resumed my drawing. Presently I was astonished to find myself lifted up, slate and all, carried out of the room, and set down in the passage outside—the study door being closed and locked behind me.

I was furious; my indignation at what I considered injustice was boundless, because I was in no way conscious of having offended. I therefore kicked the door as hard as ever I could. The commotion brought my mother upon the scene. After exchanging a few words with my father, she explained to me that I had made a grating noise with my pencil upon the slate, which had set his teeth on edge, and as he could not make me understand how disagreeable it was,

he had turned me out of the room. I was led away tearful and injured.

Quite recently I read a newspaper article upon heredity, and reflecting upon it, the thought struck me whether the hypersensitiveness of my parent might not point to some defect in him which is perpetuated in me in a contrary direction—some malformation of the drum of the ear which magnified sound painfully to him, and deadened it altogether in me. A foolish fancy, perhaps, like many of mine.

It was his practice, after some hours of close reading or writing, to clear his thoughts — so he expressed it — by rapid exercise up and down a path which skirted our garden. It was sheltered by finely-grown trees, and was still known as "the monk's walk," as it led directly to a large country-house some two miles distant, which had originally been a monastery, but at the time of the suppression of religious houses had been dismantled and bestowed on some court favourite, and had remained a private dwelling ever since. Here, wet or dry, my father scarcely ever failed to take his constitu-

tional, and here I often used to follow him; he said it never disturbed him, and I delighted in trying to imagine his thoughts.

Memory presents me with a picture of myself at this period — a long-limbed, slender girl, with great dreamy eyes looking out from under a sun-bonnet.

But there were days when the monk's walk was not enough for my father, when some idea was struggling in his mind for shape or expression, or when he had been disturbed in some way. At these times he would set off by himself, no one knew where, and he never returned until he was tranquillised in mind, though fatigued in body. My mother and I were quite accustomed to watch his retreating figure, wrapped in his old Inverness cape, a soft felt hat drawn over his eyes; and we knew, wherever his expedition might lead him, it was necessary to restore him to an equable frame of mind.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

Beyond, like a well-known picture, All small and fair, are strewed Houses, and gardens, and people, Oxen, and meadows, and woods.

HEINE.

IVY mother had adapted herself with admirable tact to the peculiarities of her husband's character, his variations between storm and calm. She was no less eminently calculated to train a child like myself, although she confessed to me in later years that it had not always been thus; that she quite believed the patience she had been obliged to exercise towards me, and the pity and sympathy I had awakened in her had not been without its softening influence; that she was inclined to be too matterof-fact herself, and too intolerant of certain inequalities of disposition in others, and that watching the growth of my character, its impulsiveness and passion-

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ate outbreaks of temper, followed by bitter repentance, had taught her to understand my father better, whom, in many respects, I resembled. Having resolved to devote herself to me, and to the development of such faculties as I possessed, she became first my nurse, then my playmate, later my teacher, and always my dearest companion and truest friend, and as I never had brother or sister, nothing ever came between us, or occurred to deter her from the course she had marked out for herself. Unlike my father, she had no nervous shrinking from the poor. She delighted in being his almoner, and found her way to every cottage in the parish, knew every child, good or bad, healthy or sickly, tired herself by carrying baskets of provisions to them when they were in need, and made garments for them at home.

What our rector would have done without her is a mystery to me. He was an old bachelor, something of a scholar, with many tastes in common with my father. He often used to climb the steep hill leading to our house, to the detriment of his breathing. He was

invariably invited to remain to dinner. It was always a simple meal; and as I was no barrier to conversation, I had been accustomed from quite a young child to have a tiny portion then by way of supper. When the rector was present, he used to crack a nut, or peel an orange, and pass it to me. After that he used to pat my head, and seem to feel he had done all that could be expected of him. Then he would resume his discussion with my father.

Our visitors were few and far between, perhaps for the reason that the last mile of road approaching our house was so steep that people did not like to tax their horses by driving up. Our own stout pony was well broken in to it, so that my mother occasionally drove out to pay visits at the country houses which nestled amongst the hills. She used to take me with her, but I preferred remaining in the chaise with Peter (who drove us), as a call was dreary work for me. There were but few children at any of the houses, and even if there had been more, my silence would have been embarrassing on both sides.

Sometimes she went to either Gloucester or Cheltenham, and then I was always glad to accompany her. The shop windows were a delight to me, and everyone I met did not know of my affliction, and I am afraid I liked to mislead people, and pretend that I was talking.

This extreme sensitiveness was very trying to me in our own village. So long as my mother confined her visits to the few cottages near us I was content to go with her, as I had long ceased to be an object of wonder or pity to the people who lived in them; but when my mother carried her ministrations farther afield, and went down into the village proper, which lay in the valley, I joined her very reluctantly. I could face any number of villagers collectively at church or at school treats, but to be stared at as if I were a melancholy curiosity was more than I could bear. I hated being made the subject of conversation. It provoked me beyond endurance not to know what was being said about me, and seemed to rouse all that was suspicious in my nature. I used to turn

away, and rush home as fast as my legs would carry me, knowing my mother would soon follow me. I believe I always let the great gate, which separated our drive from the road, shut with a loud slam. Of course I could not hear it, but the violent action was a vent to my feelings. I kept my eyes purposely away from my mother's, knowing she would put her fingers on her lips, which was her telegraphic way of letting me know that I made too much noise, equivalent, I suppose, to saying "Hush" to a hearing child.

After an outburst of this kind I felt better, especially if I sat down on the bench, and looked about me for awhile, for I can scarcely remember an occasion when the view to be obtained from it failed to charm and soothe me.

Far away before us lay Cheltenham, with its college and the spires of its churches glittering in the sunshine. Still farther away, and only discernible on clear days, rose the massive front of Tewkesbury Abbey, and, still more faintly seen in the far distance, a wooded country, stretching away into Worces-

tershire. On the right a line of hills shut in the horizon, but between us and them sloped a green valley, framing the calm waters of a large reservoir, which, to my inexperienced eyes, had all the appearance of a natural lake. On the left the square tower of Gloucester Cathedral reared its head beyond this; sometimes indistinct and misty, sometimes so clear and sharply defined you felt as if you could touch them, rose the Malvern Hills, which my father loved to point out as the scene of Piers Plowman's vision. Ah, Piers, my friend, how many eyes since yours, five centuries ago, have outlined those dear hills and dreamed their dreams!

The ground rose very abruptly behind our house, so that the first-floor windows of the front were level with the doors at the back. By going out of one of the latter you found yourself upon a little eminence crowned with fir trees, between which we used to sling hammocks in the summer months. Following a gradually ascending path, you reached an ancient maypole, the starting-point in days of old for cheese trundling.

From this point of vantage even a more extended view presented itself, embracing yet more distant hills and the windings of the Severn on its journey to the sea.

Immediately before the house, but below its level, ran a road leading to some half-dozen cottages, mostly occupied by people in my father's employment. It also led to a farmhouse rich in wainscot. The road narrowed as it skirted a copse. The trees grew densely on the sharp rising ground to the right, but more sparsely on the slope to the left, thus affording occasional glimpses of the hills beyond. A diverging path at this point led to the remains of a Roman villa; but-by keeping to the central path you emerged once more upon the high road, and in course of time arrived at a little village, interesting only on account of containing a pottery.

This was all upon the eastern side of the hill. On the western lay the great high road, leading out into the only world I knew. Passing by a little cheese farm, whose outbuildings, with their heavily mullioned windows, bore evidence of

having been used for monastic purposes in the far-off past, it descended very sharply into the valley below.

Our house was long and irregular, and though old, seemed to belong to no particular period. It would appear as if each owner had added a room here or there according to his fancy. I suppose it was built of brick, but from time immemorial it had been coated with stucco, which many winters had changed from white to greenish grey. The architect seemed to have expended all his skill upon the porch; it was half circular, of considerable size, and supported by classic pillars; the top, being surrounded by a light iron railing, made a pleasant balcony, where my mother kept her myrtles and fuchsias.

Our rooms were low-pitched, rather square than long. Both the drawing and dining room were panelled with oak. My father's study was the most modern room in the house; he had chosen it on account of its wide windows, loving, as he did, both air and light.

There were many curious little nooks and corners in the house; amongst

them an odd little cupboard with a Gothic window, which looked as if it might once have been an oratory.

One of the attics was set apart as my play-room; there in rainy weather I spent hours together. It had wainscot, like many of the other rooms, only, that instead of being dark with age, it had been painted a uniform drab. Close inspection revealed, under this coat of paint, no less than three portraits, only visible when the light fell in a certain direction. One occupied a panel to itself. Such a bad, cruel face! It precisely embodied all my notions of the wicked uncles I had read about in storybooks. Another panel contained two portraits: one very indistinct, the other that of a melancholy-looking child. Faint traces of ruff and doublet led to the supposition that they belonged to the Elizabethan period. And my father believed it was some old wood-work brought from a house long since demolished. Curious as it may seem, these shadowy faces in no way frightened me; on the contrary, I regarded them as companions, and many were the imag-

inary conversations I held with them — the stern one rebuking me when I was naughty, the sad one sympathising with me in my childish troubles.

Our household at that time consisted of a prim and staid parlour-maid, named Dorcas, whose efforts at talking to me on her fingers seemed only to be attempted when she wished to reprove me; a good-tempered cook, who could neither read nor write, but who had such a wealth of gestures at her command that I hardly ever failed to understand her; a girl named Lucy, who helped both cook and housemaid, and was seldom in favour with both at once; and, most important of all, Peter, who combined in his elderly person the offices of coachman, head gardener, and confidential servant. There was also a small boy named Toby, who waited on Peter, and made himself useful or troublesome as the mood seized him.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

Half in dreams I sorrow after The delight of early skies, The delight of happy laughter, The delight of low replies.

TENNYSON.

I AM told that when once I had mastered the difficulties of reading and writing my progress in learning was rapid; to me it appeared lamentably slow.

I knew what all the objects surrounding me were called, but this failed to satisfy me, for I think my intelligence was in advance of my power of expression, as I soon divined that conversation was one thing, mere utterance of any particular wish another. My wants I could make known with very little effort, but the thoughts with which my brain was teeming were still in chaos; they wanted the fairy Order to wave her wand over them, to sort them, as she did the tangled silks in the old story.

I began to watch people when they were talking, and I knew they could not be using so many words just to say they were cold or hungry or tired; they must be employing their tongues for a different purpose.

I became very inquisitive, and wished to know how those gifted with fluency of speech expressed themselves; and I read with the greatest avidity, but for a long while with only meagre profit, as books written for infant minds were the only kind completely within my comprehension.

I was always happiest out of doors. Something in the face of Nature — the clouds in the sky, the sunshine, the distant hills, the trees, and the smell of the freshly turned earth, spoke to me in a language I could understand, tranquillised me, and many times kept me from absolute despair. I had a humble friend there, too, whose homely face always wore a smile of welcome at my approach.

As long as I could remember toddling about with a little spade or rake, so long had I loved to follow Peter about the old-walled garden; he it was who

taught me how to sow the seeds in my own precious border, and made me understand by vigorous pantomimic signs that I "must let them bide a bit." Who but Peter brought me the earliest ripe strawberry or bunch of currants reposing on a fresh green leaf, or led me along to find the first violet of the spring?

He and his wife lived in one of the cottages close by, and my objection to visiting never extended to them; on the contrary, I sometimes went there of my own accord. I liked to watch their tall solemn-looking clock, which, in some marvellous way, showed the days of the week and month and the changes of the moon, as well as the hour. They had become reconciled to my not being able to hear it tick; but for all that I used to get them to open the case, for I wanted to see the swing of its great pendulum. I think something within me kept time to it. Their cottage also contained some of the old carved oak chests and corner cupboards which the furniture dealers have not yet succeeded in wresting from the sturdy families who

have owned them for generations, and in the possession of which they still feel an honest pride.

On fine mornings I almost always spent some time walking up and down the trim paths of our garden watching my old friend digging or raking or nailing up the trailing branches of some luxurious grower, or peeping between the rose trees and lavender bushes to see how this or that thing was flourishing, for in our sweet garden flowers, fruits, and vegetables grew side by side in fragrant companionship.

It was a great pleasure to me to find that Peter could sometimes read what I wanted to tell him, if I put it down very plainly indeed. He usually sat down on a garden-roller or wheelbarrow, or anything which stood conveniently near; reading was far too important an occupation to be performed standing or in haste, and every word was spelt out with conscientious care. The answer was conveyed by various signs, a sort of code of signals being established between us. Sometimes, when he had a great deal to say, he would bring me a

little letter which he had written at home; I believe these were produced during the leisure of Sunday afternoon, as they always appeared on Mondays. They were all written on fancy notepaper, with scalloped edges; his wife told my mother that he had laid in a stock of it at the Whitsuntide wake, and that he took "mighty pains with them to please little miss." I have many of them still - little crumpled fragments, misspelt and ungrammatical; yet they are very dear to me. They all relate some trifling incident in the village, or garden, or his own family; they all breathe a spirit of sympathy with my trouble, and exhibit a desire to please and amuse me.

Poor old Peter was a very real blessing to me in those days, for though my father was goodness itself, and my mother was a perfect well-spring of patience and tenderness, the contrast between my own untutored mind and the cultivation of my parents was growing painfully perceptible, and the child-like simplicity of Peter was often a relief to me. It was a blank day when

a cold or the weather prevented me from going out to watch him at work.

I think as I grew older I must have occasioned my mother a great deal of anxiety and pain, for a morbid taste for solitude was daily gaining upon me, and I was subject to sudden gusts of temper.

My worst days were those following dreams in which I had revelled in full possession of all the senses. I listened to the babbling of brooks, the song of birds, and the voices of friends; then, in my frantic efforts to speak, I awoke. I was disturbed for hours after the awaking. Sometimes I broke out into a tempest of rebellion, resenting my cruel fate with a bitterness it is impossible to describe. At others, I was overwhelmed with my speechless grief, and took refuge in my attic - no snail ever retired more completely within its shell - and there I would sit, brooding over my misfortunes.

My mother wisely forbore interference. I think she hoped that my own instincts, aided by the higher aims she endeavoured to set before me, would

ultimately win the day, and that I should resign myself to the inevitable and make the best of my poor life.

I had already begun to exhibit passion for painting, which my parents sought to encourage, but for a long while my nervous self-consciousness prevented me from taking lessons. preferred working in my own untaught way, save for the few hints my mother was able to give me. At length, how-ever, my desire for improvement prevailed over my objections, and I went twice a week to our nearest town to study under a private teacher. I could not bring myself yet to face a large class at the school of art, but my lessons were a source of genuine enjoyment to me. I became more cheerful and contented, and shook off much of the gloom which had overshadowed my childhood, although I was still subject to occasional bursts of violent emotion. As an instance of this, I remember that once after my drawing lesson was over my mother took me to the afternoon service at the cathedral. She thought the sight of the beautiful edifice and the white-

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robed choristers would impress me, although no sound of the exquisite music could pierce my dull ears.

Great was her dismay and concern when I flung myself into her arms in a perfect abandonment of grief. As soon as she could withdraw quietly, she led me into the nave, and there inquired what had distressed me.

I pointed to the organ, which must have been still pealing, for I felt it vibrating through every nerve of my body. I was quivering with the most painful emotion, and could not restrain my sobs, although I was afterwards very much ashamed of having made such an exhibition of my feelings.

We never attempted to attend the service again; but I used to wander through the precincts, and was never tired of admiring the cloisters with their fan-traceried roof. My father, finding me so much interested in them, got me some books on architecture, which enabled me to understand the fine old building and trace its chequered history.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

I walk with noiseless feet the round of uneventful years. — JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

THE years rolled tranquilly by with little to mark their course but the succession of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest.

There were few changes in our scanty population—here a marriage, there a birth or death. The dear old rector, who, it must be admitted, had allowed things to go on in rather a sleepy fashion, was gathered to his fathers, and a younger man reigned in his stead. He was the soul of energy—collected money far and wide for the restoration of the church, in which he took quite an antiquarian interest, for was there not a real Norman arch, with hatchet and zig-zag ornamentation upon it, and some herring-bone masonry in its ancient walls?

He was an authority upon the subject of vestments, of which he possessed a pleasing variety; was an enthusiast in church music, and got up a surpliced choir before he had been amongst us six months, so that between choir practice, service on saints' days, and parochial visiting, his time was fully occupied, and we saw little of him.

With our own home, time had dealt lightly. The furrows on my father's brow were a little deeper perhaps. A thread of silver might be detected in my mother's shining hair. Dorcas was a trifle more gaunt and bony. Good-tempered cook had married, and, presumably, was preparing humble meals for her husband and children instead of plentiful ones for us. Peter was a little more bent with rheumatism. Toby had grown up, and, having enlisted — he always had a mad passion for soldiering — had passed out of our knowledge.

The one exception was myself. I had crossed the spot "where brook and river meet," and had entered early womanhood, and my glass told me that

I was beautiful. The reflection was more eloquent than speech. Nature, while withholding some gifts, had been lavish with others, for she had given me perfect health, and not only beauty of face, but of form also; even the clumsy garments made by a country dressmaker could not altogether distort my graceful outlines.

There were times when it was a joy to me to recognise this, but there were also moments when I asked myself why things were thus, and I would have cheerfully bartered away my own comeliness for one echo of sound, one syllable of speech. I would even have welcomed bodily suffering, if by so doing I could have purchased the power of communicating with others.

Drawing was my great resource, and year by year I grew more skilful.

I had sketched nearly every point of interest within reach of home, and always returned from our summer so-journ near the sea with a full sketch-book. In the winter I amused myself with making designs for the pottery near us. My father had found his way there

in one of his disturbed moods, had argued with the potter about the inartistic shapes he turned out, and had set me the task of improving them, using as my model the Etruscan vase, of which I obtained a book of engravings.

My attic was still a favourite retreat. There always seems to me something melancholy in leaving a house where you have lived a long while. You cannot pack up and carry away in the great vans with your household gods the thoughts with which you have peopled its chambers, or bear away the dream-children which have been born there. I would not have exchanged that low and somewhat inconvenient room for the most perfectly proportioned apartment any architect could design. It is true that the floor was uneven, that it was but indifferently lighted; its one window with the leaded panes was insufficient, yet I should have scarcely cared to look through any other at the familiar landscape "over the hills and far away," and the moon, when at the full, always peeped at me through it. My thoughts and hopes seemed to have woven them-

selves into its fabric; feelings which were hardly acknowledged to myself, met me like loved friends round that shabby little hearth. I had put some beautifying touches to it, and it was now cosy enough.

Even in this remote corner of the world I had not quite escaped the mania for decoration. Art serge, china, and Japanese screens were in it. The gaudy chromo-lithographs, from the Christmas number of the Graphic, which had adorned its walls when it was my playroom, had been replaced by some of my own sketches, a few good prints, and some reproductions of the Arundel Society. The earnest spirit of the early Italian masters harmonised with my own aspirations. All the little treasures which I had acquired during my twentythree years of life were gathered there. I had quite an affection for some of them, such as a person situated like myself may feel for inanimate things associated with tender memories.

My most precious possession was a little iridescent glass globe. It had been given to me on one of my long-ago

birthdays, and it had been my selfappointed task to keep it filled with flowers. Peter helped me in this. As the autumn merged into winter he could always find a few sprigs of mignonette, one or two late monthly roses, and a crimson leaf, or later on some Christmas roses or pale snowdrops. I used to puzzle myself by wondering why the stalks looked so large under the water, and long after I knew the reason I still liked to look at them with the rainbow tints falling across them. I am afraid I had a childish taste for pretty things, just a little bit of the savage love for colour and glitter.

My mother had never sought any assistance in my general education. I believe that I knew both more and less than other young women. I could not help gaining a great deal of knowledge in a desultory sort of way from such cultivated people as my parents. They only kept in touch with the great outside world by means of books and papers; of the latter we had several every morning, and at stated intervals a great box of books arrived from

Mudie's. These I hailed with delight; they were my companions, and the characters in them lived and moved like real people.

We seldom had any visitors — just on rare occasions a middle-aged relation or friend, who seemed bored by my presence and uncertain how to treat me. My parents grew more and more exclusive. I hardly dared to inquire why, for something told me that it was on my account. No doubt, if things had been different with me, we should have gone to London, and I should have been introduced into fashionable society, as I had reason to know that our unostentatious mode of living was not dictated by economical motives.

I often wished I had a correspondent. The exchange of letters would have placed me on a more level footing with anyone than personal intercourse; but I knew no one at a distance. To say that I was not often very dull would be untrue, and I had to devise ways of amusing myself. I remember on one wet day I employed myself by making a list of all the words relating to speech and sound;

it was not a cheerful occupation, for the list was a very long one, and seemed to accentuate my affliction.

Sometimes I was seized with a wild desire to do something rash and absurd. I used to sit opposite our old picture in the dining-room, and indulge in strange It was a large painting by fancies. Wynants, and my father prized it very dearly. The foreground was occupied with a hunting scene, the figures and animals being painted by Lingelbach. This part did not interest me very much; but when the firelight, playing upon the canvas, revealed the depths of the forest in the background, I felt stirred by something like envy; for advancing along one of its glades came a party of horsemen, who seemed to bring life and activity into it. Then I felt as if I could smell the crisp air of the October morning, and the scent of the leaves just beginning to turn yellow on the trees, and be swept by the rush of cool wind left in the wake of the cantering horses. What would I not give to be up and away, riding on and on in pursuit of adventure!

I tried more than once to get up a little excitement. I was an excellent walker, and knew every road and lane within a few miles of my home. I often wished that something out of the common would happen to me; but I never met more than a few straggling villagers, to whose rustic salutation a nod or a smile was sufficient answer.

It was impossible to refrain from now and then casting a questioning glance into the future. Looking down the dim vista of years, which I might reasonably expect would be mine, was I never to see more than my own solitary figure treading that silent avenue? I was conscious that I possessed capacities for loving deeply and unselfishly if ever the occasion came; but how were those dormant sensibilities to be awakened, when I dwelt in a sort of garden of sleep far removed from life's great highway? a condition of things less the result of my muteness than of my parents' desire to protect me from all mortification and annoyance, which they seemed to predict for me if once I were launched in society.

For my part, and I was the person most concerned, I would gladly have run the risk, for all here seemed to glide by with wearisome slowness, except the precious years of my youth, and they were vanishing with alarming swiftness. But they were so unspeakably good to me that I could not grieve them by running counter to their wishes, and must therefore school myself, at all events, to outward content.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

Action is eloquence, and the eyes of the ignorant more learned than their ears.

SHAKSPEARE.

A MONGST the few deaths which had occurred in our little community was one which, at the time, hardly appeared likely to affect us in any way beyond the sympathy we felt naturally for the family. It was that of the young man who rented the farm under the hill, on the road to the pottery. He was in a slow decline for many months, and when at last he died, his widow determined to carry on the farm on her own account. She had gained experience in its management during her husband's long illness. The number of acres attached to it was small, but the house itself was a good one, with a fine oak-panelled parlour, and other comfortable rooms; and she hoped to be able to let lodgings in the summer,

and having only two little girls, to make enough to eke out a living for herself and them.

It was with a mixture of feelings that we contemplated the advent of strangers amongst us. My father was slightly annoyed, as he foresaw some invasion of his privacy. My mother seemed neither glad nor sorry; and I was keenly curious. Hitherto our immediate surroundings had seemed wholly our own. Now we might expect to encounter the new-comers in our daily walks, and who could say whether this would prove a pleasure or a nuisance?

Mrs. Glossop advertised in the local papers for some weeks without success. At last, one fine morning early in July, Peter appeared, with news written on every feature of his face; and I knew he had something to tell us. With his usual pantomimic gestures, which by this time had become very intelligible, he gave me to understand that Mrs. Glossop had the prospect of a lodger. Further inquiry elicited that it was a gentleman — a young university gentleman, coming to this quiet retreat to

read. His name was Rivers, and his people lived at Cheltenham. They were a large and rather boisterous family, with only a widowed mother to keep them in order, so that resting in its bosom was not precisely peace. This was the eldest son. His father, Colonel Rivers, had died five years before, when on foreign service.

We heard no more for some days. But one morning I set out with my sketching materials to the copse between our house and the pottery. I had noticed a singularly beautiful peep between the trees; it would be a difficult sketch, but I determined to attempt it.

I had settled myself very comfortably at the side of the road which skirts the plantation; behind me the ground rose to the summit of the hill, and was covered with trees of moderate size, and an undergrowth of bushes and ferns, which made a clamber up rather laborious; below me spread the valley, veiled in a luminous haze, and the sunshine falling across the path, flecked here and there by the tremulous shadows of the trees, made a charming fore-

ground for my picture, while spreading branches framed it on either side. I felt that I must hasten to catch these fleeting effects of light and shade.

I had not been sitting there long before a very tall young man walked past me. His broad shoulders and length of limb would have made him conspicuous anywhere, but in a village like ours no new face could pass unnoticed.

I concluded, naturally, that Mrs. Glossop's lodger had arrived, and that this must be he. He was roughly dressed in a tweed suit, a coarse straw hat set back upon his closely-cropped head, and he merely bestowed a careless glance upon me in passing, as he stepped aside to avoid treading upon my sunshade, which I had stupidly thrown across the path.

Of course I cannot hear anybody approach me, but I have a sort of inner consciousness of the proximity of another person, even before I can see anyone, and it seemed to be only a minute or two later that I became aware of this young man's presence again. He was striding swiftly towards me, almost

at a run, and I saw that his lips moved hurriedly. He looked slightly scared, too, and waved his hands as he came. A dreadful thought took possession of me. After all, it could not be Mrs. Glossop's lodger, but it must be one of those unfortunate lunatics escaped from the asylum near the town. I had been told of such things happening, and had been warned to be careful when on my painting expeditions.

I resolved to take no notice of him, and pretend I did not see him, bending at the same time closely over my sketch. My heart began to beat violently when he came and stood beside me, evidently talking excitedly; but my terror rose to a climax when in another instant he seized my hand, and began to drag me up through the steep copse.

I saw that he was still talking and urging me forward, and it was in vain that I tried to withdraw my hand. On he pulled me, crushing the ferns under our feet. The brambles caught and tore my pretty summer gown, but I could not stop to disengage them. My hairpins flew about like hailstones, and one long

braid escaped from its fastenings, and bobbed up and down between my shoulders. My hat was all awry. The thorns and brushwood scratched my ankles as we trampled through them. Here and there a loose stone rolled away under my feet, and would have thrown me down but for his iron grasp upon my wrist. My breath came in fitful gasps. He must have seen that I was half-paralysed with fright; but he was pitiless, and still pursued his mad career.

Having reached the top, we encountered a high stone wall; the mosses and grasses which grew in its crevices helped to knit it firmly together. He never paused to look for the gate, which I knew was only a few paces distant, but taking me in his arms as if I had been a feather's weight, he hoisted me up, and helped me to scramble over; then he vaulted over himself. I was too breathless to offer resistance; besides, I thought obedience was safest. I had understood that you should never oppose a mad person. No doubt the poor creature feared his keepers were

in pursuit of him, and had taken the insane fancy to make me share his flight; surely if I went quietly with him I should meet some one who would rescue me. We were now in the open ground on the summit of the hill, and there would be people at work near.

But once over the wall he showed no disposition to move. He seemed to be asking me questions, and he even began to smile; neither was his smile so wild or wicked as I should have expected to find it.

The ground was much higher on this side of the wall than on the other, and he could easily see over it, and I could do so too by standing on tiptoe. He looked down eagerly, and my eyes following the direction of his, discerned between the interlacing branches a tawny object tearing with fiercest speed along the very path I had so lately and so reluctantly quitted. Presently I saw a flash of colour — which I guessed rightly was my scarlet sunshade, flung aside, with an angry toss, and by and by followed two men with pointed sticks, whom I at once conjectured were drovers.

This, then, was the reason of our headlong flight; it was not my companion but the bull who was mad. He had no doubt seen it approaching from the cross roads, had, perhaps, heard it roar, and had rushed back to warn me and help me to a place of safety. Precious moments had been lost by his inability to make me understand, and it had literally been a run for life.

All this passed quickly through my mind, and, then, it is difficult to say which feeling got the mastery - shame, gratitude, or mortification. I buried my face in my hands and burst into uncontrollable sobs, the scalding tears trickling between my fingers. When at last I looked up my companion was still at my side; he seemed concerned, but at the same time I caught a twinkle of amusement in his eye. I could plainly see that he only thought of me as a girl whose nerves had been shaken, and that I was indulging in hysterics. I must let him know, therefore, how things were with me.

My parents had always sheltered me so sedulously, and our country life had

been so retired, that I had been spared the pain of announcing my infirmity to others. Now, for the first time, I had no alternative. I must inflict upon myself the bitter humiliation of writing down those hateful words.

After rummaging in my pocket, I produced a small notebook and pencil, with which I was never unprovided, and wrote in plain words with cruel distinctness,—

I AM DEAF AND DUMB.

I could not have suffered more if they had been written in my heart's blood.

Then suddenly the absurdity of the situation struck me, and I laughed to such an extent that it became the young man's turn to suspect that I was mad.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

I prized every hour that went by Beyond all that had pleased me before. WILLIAM SHENSTONE.

A FTER this there could be no question whether we should be acquainted with our new neighbour, and my father called upon Thurstan Rivers the same afternoon.

Our intimacy grew apace. Scarcely a day passed without our meeting either morning, afternoon, or evening. Often he dined with us, and sometimes he and my father set out for a long ramble together. He was at Merton College; my father had been at Oriel; so they had plenty to talk about in the Oxford of to-day and of the past.

He was very athletic — the captain of the football team and one of his college eleven. He was reading for the Bar, and intended to go to London occasionally after the following October, "to

eat his dinners." He told us frankly that he was not well off, and that it was necessary for him to be careful of expense. His mother and the rest of the family had gone to Tenby for a few weeks, and he knew it would be impossible to find quiet amongst so large a party in the circumscribed space of seaside lodgings; so as the house at Cheltenham was under repair, he had come away to this restful place to read without interruption. He said he had brought quite a little army of books with him, besides a great number of lecture notes for reference.

My father found him a most intelligent companion, and invited him to make use of his little library, and encouraged his studies; so that I do not think his visits to us interfered seriously with his good resolutions, because wherever he had been he must have allowed himself some time for relaxation.

He read immensely, quite beyond the field of his special studies, and his mental range was even more extensive than my father's. He came amongst us imbued with many of the new thoughts

which spring into being in an earnestminded community, and he had embraced them with all the enthusiasm of youth. My father sometimes appeared to be quietly amused at his impetuosity; but for all that they had many interesting arguments. He had one of those strong personalities which appear to infuse spirit into all those with whom they came in contact. We seemed to have merely vegetated before his arrival; he stirred our sleepy lives, and woke us up to wider aims and responsibilities.

After he had been reading very assiduously he sometimes indulged in a spell of idleness. The hammock amongst the pine trees often tempted him to rest there, but more frequently he would sink into one of our big, luxurious chairs. His whole body would relax, his shoulders nestle themselves into a comfortable position amongst the cushions, his hands drop languidly over the sides, his legs stretch out lazily before him; the few lines in his great broad forehead would smooth themselves out; his eyes would look leisurely between his thick eyelashes, a placid smile hover round his

mouth. He looked the embodiment of good-humoured indolence; but once start a subject in which he took a lively interest, the expression of both body and face would instantly change; he was on the alert directly. His shoulders would square themselves, the hands grasp the arms of the chair, the feet plant themselves firmly on the floor, the lines on the forehead would deepen with thought, the lazy smile disappear in firm lines round the expressive mouth. I never saw any one whose posture and countenance seemed more completely in harmony.

His hands were large and muscular; I considered them highly characteristic; they looked quick to grasp, firm to retain; yet his writing was so small and neat that a few leaves of paper in his pocket-book contained the condensed material for a volume.

To me he was always kind, never seeming weary of holding conversation with me, although it must have been tiresome to write the thoughts which came so quickly from his active brain. We discussed Browning, Tennyson,

Lowell, and many of my favourite authors.

Before he arrived I was in danger of growing apathetic. In my desire for resignation I had stifled aspiration; I had tried to bring into practice the words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which seemed to apply to me,—

"In my large joy of sight and touch, Beyond what others count for such, I am content to suffer much;"

for I have always had the fancy that, as my sight is the principal avenue to my understanding, the impressions thus conveyed are more vivid, and afford deeper enjoyment than to those who hear as well as see.

But after all, the vague, half-formed hopes were still there, only waiting for some magic touch to kindle them into life and animation. Had that moment arrived?

He laughed tremendously when he discovered that I knew hardly a word of slang. To tell the truth I was rather ashamed of my ignorance on this point; I had never had any opportunity of

learning, and I begged him to write me a list of words, that I might acquire them, but he shook his head vigorously, and seizing my parasol — we were out of doors at the time — he scrawled on the gravel in letters a yard long, No.

It was remarkable that a man of such keen and advanced thought, so unmistakably a scholar, should so soon win the confidence of the unlearned country people, young and old, and yet this was the case. I believe old Nanny Evans always lay in wait for him with her basket of wet linen, which she spread over the hedge to dry. She would groan, he said, and look up at him imploringly, until his pity was stirred, and he would lift it over the fence for her; and I am sure the children purposely loitered with their pails and pitchers when their mothers sent them to fetch water from the spring in the meadow, that they might coax him to carry them a little way.

He made great fun of it all, and said he was glad that there was so much amiability left in him, that the study of jurisprudence was a hardening process,

and he hoped his country life would keep him soft-hearted a little longer.

Never had our beloved hills appeared to greater advantage, and a stranger could not have found a happier season for visiting them.

We had a long spell of fine weather, and morning after morning the sun rose over Birdlip upon a sky of cloudless beauty, and kissed with a burnishing caress every humble casement turned towards his glorious face. The hedges were festooned with honeysuckle and traveller's joy, and the banks beneath them were gay with the blossoms of herb-robin and the milk-white stars of the stitchwort, while the lady's slipper and the little blue veronica contributed their share of colouring from Nature's paint-box.

The cows drowsed away the hours of mid-day heat in lazy content where creamy patches of the meadow-sweet made the low-lying pastures fragrant, and the sheep grouped themselves under the shade of the big elms in the paddock, picturesquely enough to charm the eye of a Verbeckhoven.

On the sloping fields of the uplands the corn stood, ripe for the sickle, waving like a golden sea under the passing breath of the summer wind.

Already the pear trees were bending under their burden of fruit, and gave promise of perry making by and by.

Often, after dinner, we strolled up to the maypole to get a glimpse of the broad Severn, giving back the opal and amber of the sunset sky, in which Mercury hung suspended as an evening lamp.

The nights were lovely, with an almost southern loveliness, and sometimes we lingered till the stars came out, one by one, in the blue vault above our heads, and Vega, Lyra's brightest jewel, shone out with sparkling splendour. Then the deliberate moon emerged from the low hills, and fringed the fir trees with silver, setting her last finishing touch upon the exquisite scene.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

Sadder scene was ne'er disclosed, Without, within, a hideous show; Devouring flames resistless glow, And blazing rafters downwards go.

Mid blazing beams and scalding streams,
Through fire and smoke he dauntless broke.
W. S.

WE had now arrived at the beginning of August.

The dry weather had culminated in a season of excessive heat, and the want of rain had occasioned a serious scarcity of water.

The reapers were busy with the harvest, and we pitied them, exposed, as they unavoidably were, to the scorching sun.

It had been so oppressively hot one day that we had gone to bed expecting to be disturbed by a thunder-storm during the night.

I cannot describe the manner in which

a storm affects me; it is restless excitement rather than fear. Though I am unable to hear the thunder, I am conscious of every peal, and the lightning has a perfect fascination for me. I watch every flash. I would even go to the summit of our hill to obtain a better view of it, if my parents were not so nervous on my account. I lay awake for some time, with my eyes turned towards the window, every minute expecting to see it illuminated from without; but at last, overcome by drowsiness, I dropped off to sleep.

How long I had slept I do not know, but I awoke suddenly to see every line of the sash of the window clearly outlined on the white blind. The storm had come at last then, I thought.

But lightning was only momentary. How was it that this light continued so long, and even increased in intensity? More thoroughly awakened, I began to perceive a strong smell of burning (my sense of smell is particularly acute), and springing from my bed, I rushed to the window, not waiting to draw up the blind, but merely pushing it aside.

I could see quite enough. A cloud of smoke rose high in the midnight sky, illumined by a lurid glare from below which threw every intermediate object into sharp relief. It seemed to come from the direction of Glossop's farm. I scrambled into a dressing-gown, and was soon on my way to my mother's room. We met half way. She signed to me to dress quickly, and went upstairs to rouse the servants. My father was already up, and had hurried on a few clothes.

By this time the villagers were running past our house, and the alarm seemed to be general.

It was Glossop's farm on fire, and who could expect to save it and the water so scarce, owing to the long drought, with no engine within four miles, and a steep hill to boot? It would burn like tinder, there was so much wainscot to feed the flames. At most, we could only hope to save the inmates. All these fears were being exchanged as we pressed forward—a moving crowd.

Arrived at the spot, we found Mrs. Glossop and her two little girls half-dressed, and shaking with fright. They

were too scared to know how they had escaped; they only knew that Alice, the little servant, was still in the house, and that they had been obliged to leave her there because she slept in the attic, and the stairs were already on fire. Mr. Rivers was seeing what he could do, and that seemed to satisfy them. He it was who had carried the children down and had supported and half-carried the terrified mother, and now he had gone to the cart lodge in search of a ladder. At this moment he turned the corner with a man who had been the first to arrive. They carried a ladder between them, but it was soon seen that the length was quite disproportionate. My father and Peter rushed off to fetch ours, but every instant was of consequence. The fire was rapidly gaining ground, and great tongues of flame had burst through some of the windows, literally licking up the molten glass.

Poor little Alice had just appeared at her window wringing her hands, and imploring the crowd below to save her.

Thurstan Rivers' stalwart figure stood out — a black silhouette against a back-

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ground of flame. He seemed to be everywhere, urging, encouraging, directing. He shouted cheering promises to Alice. It was evident she trusted him, for she appeared to scream no more. My mother, standing by me, now and then made signs which I understood.

Thurstan had formed the men into a line with buckets, for fortunately there was a pump near, and though we feared the supply of water would soon be exhausted he hoped to get enough to keep the fire in check till Alice was rescued. He came and spoke to my mother, with the result that Dorcas was sent running home to fetch a stout blanket and some strong rope. Soon she and my father and Peter returned, and the two ladders were lashed together as rapidly as hands could do it. While this was being done the blanket was held out by the corners to induce Alice to spring into it, as it seemed less dangerous than the attempt to rescue her with the ladder, but she shuddered and hung back.

Thurstan came to my mother again, and seemed to be asking her to give him something. She immediately took off a woollen wrap she had put round her shoulders. He dipped it in a pail of water and wound it round his face and head. Meanwhile Dorcas and some of the women were wringing out the blanket, which had also been put into water. Then two of the strongest men reared and held the ladder in front of the blazing house. Thurstan dashed more water over himself, and with the blanket coiled round his arm, began his perilous ascent.

Our hearts seemed to stand still. We watched him gradually ascending. Every instant it seemed that the ladder must catch fire or that the heat from below must overpower him.

Up to this time Alice's room had been wrapped in darkness, and we had only seen her movements by the glare from below. Now, the sudden appearance of a sheet of flame assured us that the fire had gained it, and we saw the poor child clinging despairingly to the framework of the window — a little dark form upon a lurid background.

Arrived at the topmost rung of the

ladder, we saw that Thurstan yet found it too short to reach her. How he clung to some spout or projection we were never afterwards able to tell, for we involuntarily hid our faces; but in one more precious minute we saw that he had grasped her - had somehow enveloped her in the damp blanket, and had begun his still more perilous descent. Clinging to the ladder by one hand, clutching Alice with the other, he was slowly and painfully, but steadily, descending. Already the ladder, never very strong, was straining under the added burden, and when about ten feet from the ground some fresh combustible in the burning house fed the fury of the fire and a great wreath of flame encircled the ladder at the very spot they had reached, it snapped asunder like a splinter, and he and the bundle which represented Alice were precipitated to the ground.

In breathless haste they were dragged back. Thurstan seemed to bear a charmed life, for he was soon on his feet again; but his hands were terribly scorched, and he was half-blinded with the smoke. Poor little Alice was nearly

dazed with fright and a good deal bruised, but not otherwise injured.

I wish I could have heard the ringing cheer with which they told me Thurstan was greeted.

Just at this moment the engines were espied tearing along the road; but of what avail? The fire had done its worst—the oak parlour, with its beautifully carved cornice of heraldic devices, the boast for miles round, was only a mass of charred timber; and of John Glossop's once happy home only four blackened walls remained; but Alice was saved, and we were all in too great a state of elation to sentimentalise over any other loss. She and her mistress and the little girls were taken to the cheese farm. Thurstan Rivers came to us.

My father had cider served out to all the men who had been helping. It was broad daylight before any of them thought of going home.

CHAPTER THE NINTH

Speak to me, silent wind — oh, wherefore haste

Alienate and inscrutable? How long
Shall my heart, listening, only hear thee
waste

The secret mission of thy lips among
The wild pines, in low privacy of song?
Speak to me, for me, wind! Hast thou not heard

I am alone? Oh, be to me a tongue
From death to life, for all that ever stirred
Of love or longing there, and bless me with a
word.

REGINALD FANSHAW.

A ND so it happened that Thurstan Rivers became our guest.

Even the gravest things in life may contain an element of the ridiculous. Not only his books but his clothes had been destroyed, and he had been obliged to borrow a suit of my father's until some of his could be sent from home. Those he escaped in on the night of the fire were unwearable, and those of my father's in every way too small for him.

I felt myself bubbling with laughter every time I looked at him; nothing but sympathy with his misfortune enabled me to restrain it from bursting forth. The loss of his books was really a very serious one; he had brought them all to Glossop's farm; not one had been saved, and he had not the means of replacing them, many of them being costly works. He bore it very cheerfully, but I could see it was a trial to him.

With Mrs. Glossop the case was different. She was a prudent woman, and was adequately insured, so that, beyond the pain of losing many dear, familiar belongings, which no money could restore, she had little to complain of.

For the first day or two he was almost helpless. My mother insisted upon binding up his hands with lint soaked in cooling lotion, and his eyes were so inflamed that reading was out of the question.

My father was suffering from a severe attack of rheumatism. He had been very energetic the night of the fire, and had got drenched. He made light of it

at first, but found himself so much worse as the days went by, that he very reluctantly took to his bed; and as he was never happy when my mother was out of his sight, Thurstan and I were thrown very much in each other's society. At first he could hardly write at all, as his hands were so stiff; but after a while he managed to scribble in a cramped sort of way.

As he could not occupy himself, it was natural that we should spend our time in wandering about together. It would have been so inhospitable to let him walk alone, that I could not do less than accompany him in his rambles; and it was incumbent upon me, as the daughter of the house, to do the honours of our little neighbourhood. One day I took him to the Roman pavement; another to the pottery, where I was always welcome, and in which I continued to take great interest. The rapid whirling of the wheel had some secret fascination for me. Anything that betokened speed and motion pleased me.

We loitered in the shady lanes, now seating ourselves upon some fallen tree,

now upon a stile. Our conversation became easier every day. He seemed to divine what I would say before I had concluded a sentence, and I would unconsciously put my hand on his to arrest his writing, when I in my turn guessed what he had in his mind; it was a habit I had, and it was not until I noticed that he flushed whenever I did so that there seemed to me anything unusual in the action. Sometimes, when he was very eager, his breath would sweep my cheek, and I could not help a burning blush dyeing it.

Our thoughts sprang up to meet one another. I found myself more confidential with him than I had ever been with any living creature before, not even excepting my mother.

Not long since I had discovered some books which she had consulted when she was training herself for my instruction; in them I found mention of an institution at Nassau for voice production. It declared that people who were devoid of the sense of hearing could be taught to articulate distinctly. I had lately become possessed by an over-

powering desire to conquer all difficulties, and make myself more like other people, and I determined to go there if possible, and put the system to the proof.

Naturally I asked Thurstan if he had heard of it. To my surprise he met it

with an objection.

"As you are," he wrote, "you are merely silent. Many would tell you that is an excellent thing in woman; but the artificial production of a voice might result in something harsh and discordant. Think what a pity that would be."

Then I thought of hypnotism, about which I had been reading also. Might not one discover by its means whether my vocal organs were perfect or defective?

"That might be," he replied; "but you would be under the control of another person, and would utter his thoughts, not your own. It is better to content yourself with the means you already employ for making yourself understood. You express yourself very clearly. I notice no confusion of ideas in your sentences."

I shook my head and turned away sadly; it all seemed so hopeless.

"Don't!" he wrote hurriedly. "I can't bear to hear it."

"Hear what?" I inquired innocently.

"Hear you sigh."

- "But," I replied, "a sigh is felt, not heard."
- "Certainly it is heard, and a very sorrowful sound it is."
- "I did not know a sigh was audible," was my answer. "I thought it was a breath which hurt a little. I often have it now, especially when I think of my life. What am I to do with it? How make something of it? I cannot go to Girton, or be a hospital nurse."
- "Be just as you are,—sweet and wo-manly." (How fast my heart beat as I peeped over his shoulder and saw these words; but, of course, he only wrote them to comfort me.) "Remember," he continued, "I do not admit your inability to do some useful work in the world. Think how many have achieved success, even when they have had to encounter the most formidable obstacles. It would often seem that the greater the

difficulties the more determined they became to persevere and overcome them. Fawcett, for one, surmounted them —"

He broke off suddenly, and seemed lost in thought. After a pause he resumed, "I have an idea; mentioning Fawcett has suggested it. Why should you not be eyes to the blind? You have good sight and clever fingers, and would soon learn the method of raising type according to the Braille system. You could begin by transcribing short, interesting passages from books; but after a time I see no reason why you should not write your own thoughts, which ought to be specially interesting to them, seeing that you would have the fellowship of incompleteness - if I may venture to put it so."

Here, indeed, was something entirely new presented to me. Already I was catching some of Thurstan's strength of purpose. How should I learn to do without him? My heart felt like lead at the prospect. No distant prospect either.

Our walks and conversations, which had been going on for about a week, were rapidly coming to an end.

One afternoon I had gone to the pinetree knoll, and was sitting in one of the hammocks, just balancing myself with the tips of my toes touching the ground. I had a book with me, but I was not reading. So much that was new had come into my life within the last month, that my thoughts were busy. I felt as if I could be content if things could just go on for ever as they were doing now, and yet I knew that even now change was impending. Thurstan was preparing for his departure. I had come up here to be alone in my misery; I had such a terrible fear of showing him how much I cared.

It was a typical summer day—a white cloud here and there floating over the deep blue sky. The scent of the pine trees was wafted to me with every passing breeze, but I had only a dim sense of its beauty.

I felt as if I were waking from a long and foolish but delicious dream. I tried to upbraid myself for my folly. I knew that I had been absurdly anxious about my dress, that I had spent far too much time over my hair, wondering how the

girls who went up to Commemoration did theirs. Perhaps they were not afflicted with such rebellious locks as mine, which would always break out into little stray rings and curls, and were far too profuse to be arranged with conventional exactitude; as if all this could signify one iota, or any amount of personal attractions compensate for the senses I lacked.

I do not know how long I had been dreaming, when I saw Thurstan come bounding up from below. What energy he seemed to carry into everything; how different my father and every one else seemed under his influence! He came up and seated himself in the opposite hammock. Then he brought out his note-book. It was nearly full now with our many conversations, and I longed to ask him for it to keep for my own; yet this was hardly necessary, since every word he had written was treasured in my memory.

"You cannot think how difficult it is for me to go," he wrote. "Every one has been so kind, and I feel as if I had known you all my life, but I have already been here too long. I have still an immense deal of reading to get through, and now that my books are destroyed I must go up to Oxford and use the library there. I ought to thank the fire for being the means of my having such a happy time here, but now that my eyes are no longer inflamed, I dare not be idle, so much depends upon my pulling through this time. You know some of my ideas about success. Remember, I am reading 'for honours.'

"Ask your father to write to me sometimes, and to invite me here again some day, and mind you don't forget to practise Braille."

Then turning over to a fresh page, he added:

"Till we meet again, good-bye."

He held the book for me to put my farewell words.

I bit my lip to still its quivering, and, with fingers which trembled in spite of myself, I wrote, "Good-bye."

Then he stood up and held out his hand.

I got up too, but in scrambling out of the hammock a little bunch of carnations

I had fastened in my belt fell to the ground. He looked at them wistfully, and stooped as if he would pick them up, but, with a sudden wayward impulse, I kicked them aside, and they rolled away down the little sandy declivity.

Then we turned and walked to the house together, and as we went the summer glory faded, the sun hid himself behind a cloud, and the soft breeze changed to a cold wind, which swept in chilly gusts across my face.

CHAPTER THE TENTH

In Rhine's broad-rolling waters, As in a mirror shown, Around its great cathedral The great, the holy Cologne.

HEINE.

DURING the days succeeding Thurstan's departure I retreated to my attic with pens and paper, endeavouring to set down some of the events of my life according to his suggestion.

My father's rheumatism did not abate, and at last he consented to have medical advice. The doctor did not think seriously of him, but he strongly advised a course of baths and mineral waters, as he said the rheumatism might become chronic if not got rid of before the winter set in. He thought the nerves were weak, and that change of scene was as necessary as medicine. He considered him too much of a recluse, and rejoiced to have an opportunity of ordering him away.

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My father laughed querulously, and stoutly refused to stir, saying he hated Bath and Harrowgate, and would go to neither; but when the doctor recommended Homburg he raised fewer objections, and went so far as to promise to talk the matter over with my mother. He had been in Germany more than once in his youth, and the idea of going there again was attractive to him.

Having once made up his mind to start, he was impatient to be gone, as the season at Homburg would soon be waning, and he wished to take the journey by easy stages, so that, to my unbounded astonishment, immediate preparations to leave home were made. The changes after our hitherto jog-trot existence came so thick and fast now that I felt bewildered. In less than a week after the doctor's visit we found ourselves moving slowly out of the station, leaving poor old Peter standing on the platform, shading his eyes with his hand that he might see us to the last, poor, dear old man! He looked so disconsolate I promised to write frequently, and describe all we saw. I felt

quite sorry to part from him, and leant out of the window and waved my handkerchief till a curve in the line hid him from our sight.

I had only been in London once before. People said it was quite empty, as it was out of the season, but after the dulness of the country it looked quite the reverse to me.

My father did not seem at all happy there. He often told me it was not an unmixed calamity to be deaf, and spoke of "God's great gift of speech abused." The noises tormented him, especially those made by the street boys, of whom he complained bitterly.

They had just then a favourite musichall melody, ending with an absurd refrain, which he declared would drive him mad. He used to clap his hands over his ears, or make lunges at the young rascals with his umbrella, but as surely as he silenced one, another took up the strain. I fancy they must have discovered in some mysterious way that it annoyed him, for they would stand at a discreet distance grinning and repeating it like imps of mischief, and bolt round

the first corner directly they saw him making for them. I never saw him so irascible.

I had just time to spend an hour in the National Gallery, and feast my eyes upon a few of the pictures before we were en route again. Everything was full of the charm of novelty for me. Even the crossing to Antwerp, which some people found distinctly disagreeable, was not unpleasant to me. It was blowing rather freshly, but I delighted in the motion of the boat, and could scarcely persuade myself to leave the deck and descend to the stuffy cabin below.

I regretted that our journey should be performed at night; but by sunrise we were on deck again, and found ourselves in the Scheldt, steaming past its low-lying banks, bordering meadows which, a month or two before, must have been sweet with new-mown hay. Every little wharf seemed alive with the business of the new day—loading or unloading from great flat-bottomed boats, which abound on this great water-way. But soon the tall lace tower of the cathe-

dral came in view, rearing its delicate spire against the sky, high above the surrounding roofs, while a stern-looking old prison kept its gloomy watch by the quay. The one seemed to represent religion, the other law. Presently all was forgotten in the confusion and bustle of landing. Once on foreign soil, I do not think I felt my dumbness so acutely. If by chance any strangers spoke to me, I was spared the awkwardness of an explanation. They merely supposed I did not reply because I was unacquainted with the language in which I was addressed.

My father was anxious to see the Musée Plantin, so we halted a day in Antwerp. Either he was already better, or he forgot his rheumatism in his delight in examining the beautiful specimens of printing with which the museum abounds. The house in which these treasures are exhibited is also interesting, as it is preserved in much the same state as it was in the seventeenth century, and gives a fairly correct idea of how the burghers of that day lived. Some of the rooms are furnished with finely-carved oak.

Christopher Plantin, the founder of the house, must have been a remarkable man. I was glad to meet with a little book, and find out more about him.

My father was riveted to the glass cases, closely inspecting the fine initial letters, and going into raptures over the elaborate bindings, so my mother and I ensconced ourselves in a snug little corner, and read about this said Christopher Plantin. We found that he was born in France in 1514; he lived through a most stormy period, and after various vicissitudes in that country, settled in Antwerp, where, in spite of all obstacles, he succeeded in producing books of exquisite workmanship, both without and within, for early in life he had mastered the craft of book-binding and morocco-dressing as thoroughly as in later life he mastered the art of printing.

He took for his motto "Labore et Constantia," and never was motto more completely justified. He had the ambition to equal, if not surpass, his predecessors, who, in the first half of the century, made Antwerp one of the principal markets for books in the world.

He commenced without fortune, without resources of any kind. He passed through the most agitated period the country has ever known. Often his only safety was in flight from the town of his adoption. Often, too, he saw himself deceived in his dearest hopes. Nevertheless, he succeeded in achieving works as remarkable for their perfection as prodigious in their number, and he founded a house which, thanks to the solidity of its basis, and the legitimacy of its reputation, existed during three centuries.

I thought, when I had read this account, how much it would please Thurstan Rivers. He would tell me it was another instance of a successful battle, and bid me take courage.

We stayed for two days in Brussels. My mother took me to the Wierts Gallery, which we both heartily regretted. Those terrible pictures, however clever they may be, steeped me in horror, and I dreamt dreadful dreams after seeing them.

After this short rest, we proceeded to Cologne. We were all greatly amused

at the welcome given to us by the smiling porter at the Hotel du Nord; we thought he must have mistaken us for someone else, until we found that his friendliness extended to all alike. He was a wonderful person, arranging people's routes for them and busying himself with their luggage. He carried my mother's bonnet-box as tenderly as if it had contained a coronet of diamonds, and picked up my father's newspaper and guide-book with the air of an old and tried servant quite used to his habit of dropping things. Peter himself could not have done better.

I set off to the cathedral as soon as we had engaged our rooms. It was so near that I did not mind venturing there alone. I can hardly record my full impression of its perfect beauty, I had been so accustomed to a blending of the various styles of architecture in our dear cathedral at home, to its massive Norman piers and arches in the nave, in sharp contrast to the delicate statuary and tabernacle work of the south porch, and to the windows with the bar tracery and ball flowers belonging to the

late decorated period, that the perfection of this edifice as a whole gave me a sort of breathless sensation. When I stood before its two grand western towers and looked up, up at their immeasurable height, they filled me with a kind of awe, as if I were gazing at mountains of masonry.

Never before had I beheld anything so complete. The utmost care was perceptible in every detail: every cusp and crocket and finial finely chiselled. There was no blending of styles here, and it was wonderful to contemplate that a building which had taken centuries to erect should have carried out so completely the architect's original conception.

We visited many other churches of interest, as well as the museum, but I always came back to the cathedral with unabated admiration, and loved to linger in its vast nave with the subdued but many-coloured lights streaming through its gorgeous windows.

It was very refreshing to return to the hotel garden after our sight-seeing. There was always a fountain playing and little tables set out for meals under

the verandah. It amused us to watch the fresh arrivals and the indefatigable porter.

I felt almost sorry when we left for Coblentz, but we had already arrived at the first week in September, and time was precious. We travelled there by train, and were met at the station by a little omnibus, which jolted us over the rough stones and deposited us at the Bellevue Hotel. Here I had a room overlooking the rapidly flowing Rhine, and here I took up my station immediately. Just opposite was the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, and the way to it led over a bridge of boats. I had wished to see such a bridge ever since I had read Jessie Fothergill's "First Violin." I watched all who crossed. Soon quite a crowd congregated at the barrier, for it had to be opened to let a large steamer and several boats pass through.

There were German soldiers looking as stiff as plaister images; peasant women, some with little silk caps about as big as a teacup; others with a paper-knife thrust through their thick braids of hair; a tiny cart, little larger than a wheelbarrow, filled with unpleasantly

purple meat, and drawn by a pathetic-looking dog, who sniffed his burden patiently and turned hungry eyes from side to side. There were women with fruit for sale, which they put up in odd little three-cornered paper bags—nothing quite English, and for that reason all the more delightful to me.

I was reluctant to leave the balcony, but it was dinner-time, and there was more to do afterwards. First we were to walk in the beautiful gardens which border the river, and afterwards we were to go to the Casino for an hour, where there was dancing in a large hall.

It did not at all realize my idea of a ball-room. The girls were all in ordinary summer walking-dresses of some light material, and kept on their hats. The men wore frock-coats; the officers uniform. They danced something which my mother said was a sort of combination of lancers and quadrilles, with an endless variety of figures. One funny little man, with a round head and spectacles, and his coat buttoned tightly round his fat little body, appeared to be a sort of master of the ceremonies, for

I noticed that all the couples followed his lead. My mother told me he gave a little guttural croak at each change of figure, which I suppose was a word of command. The room was long, very brilliantly lighted, and overpoweringly hot. The dancers—who moved from the sides only, none from either end—looked as if they were in danger of being melted. Those who, like ourselves, did not dance, sat on raised seats against the wall and watched the rest.

I could not understand why so many of the men had their faces deeply scarred. I put it down to the fact that the Germans are a nation of soldiers, and that they had been wounded in war; but my father explained to me that a foolish custom of sword-fighting prevails amongst students, and they are actually proud of slicing and being sliced. After this, I often met young men in coloured caps with their faces a mass of sticking-plaister—a sight which made me shudder.

The next day saw us steaming slowly up the Rhine. I got quite a stiff neck

with turning from side to side, I was so afraid of missing any of the ruined castles; but I must confess to a feeling of disappointment. There was so much of this busy nineteenth century life as to extinguish the romance of the past, and it seemed no longer the Rhine of "Childe Harold," overrun as it is, and made commonplace by the foot of the modern tourist.

We left the steamer at Bingen, and continued our journey to Homburg, via Frankfort, where there was a change of trains. My father was so much better already that there hardly seemed any necessity for him to go. He was altogether a different man from the studious recluse of the Cotswold.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

A person will often be stung for his curiosity.

POPE.

THE great railway station of Frankfort loomed large in the distance. It was an immense new building, which we saw for a very long while before we reached it.

The hands of its great clock pointed to twenty-five minutes to seven as we steamed slowly in, punctual to the minute, and our train for Homburg would not leave till thirty-eight minutes past seven — more than three-quarters of an hour to wait. What a pity to waste them at a railway station when there was an interesting town close by!

My father seemed tired, and as he had eaten very little on board the boat, my mother persuaded him to go to the refreshment counter for a cup of coffee. Perhaps, after all, he was not quite so well as we had fancied, and his unwonted

exertions since we left home might be telling upon him.

Still, the idea of seeing something of Frankfort possessed me—to be close to Goethe's birthplace, I had read that it was there, and not to see it, was tantalising in the extreme. Quick as lightning my mind was made up, and there was no time to spare. Why should I not set out alone, and, at all events, get a glimpse of the town? I felt emboldened to do it, for during the few days we were in Cologne I had often ventured out by myself, and no harm had come to me. I began to think I had a talent for finding my way, as I never seemed to miss any of the short cuts. I would keep a strict look-out for the "Verboten" and "Untersagt" - which rose up in startling characters at all sorts of unexpected places - and take care not to trespass. My parents were leisurely sipping their coffee; the luggage was all registered, there was nothing for me to do but to deposit my little handbag by my mother's side, and give her to understand that I should return presently. Then I set off. I must own

that my pulses were rather quickened by my new-found sense of independence.

First I emerged upon a fine broad road — no trace here of the narrow ancient streets which I had pictured; then I came to enclosures, which seemed like public gardens, and to some handsome houses, evidently the dwellings of wealthy citizens.

The place appeared to me more like a suburb than the real town, but, nothing daunted, I hurried on. At last, growing impatient, I changed my route by taking a turning to the left, making careful observations to help me on the way back. My perseverance was rewarded by soon finding myself in a street. Following this with rapid steps, I reached an open space where there was a large statue, or rather group of statues. I walked round, examining it minutely, and soon discovered that it was a monument erected to the memory of Guttenberg. I spent some little time contemplating it. Coming freshly from the Plantin Museum, it was natural that I should feel interested in anything connected with printing. I walked round it

a second time, trying to make out those whom the portraits on the frieze represented, but the fading light prevented me from seeing them clearly. I had not noticed till then how dark it had grown. It must be late, and my walk must have taken longer than I expected; I had better hurry to the station.

With this intention I turned my back regretfully upon the vista of streets I saw opening temptingly before me, and took, as I believed, the road I had just left. I had not proceeded far before I fancied that it seemed unlike the one by which I had come, but I quieted myself by thinking that places looked different according to the point from which you approached them, and that very soon I should find myself near the station. On I walked, but no sign of the great building presented itself, and although it was growing darker every minute, I felt sure it would be brilliantly lighted up, and that I should recognise it immediately. I began to feel very uneasy, not so much on my own account, but because my parents would be in a painful state of anxiety. It was an

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uncomfortable predicament, and to add to it I remembered that I was absolutely penniless. My purse with the English money I had brought from home was reposing at the bottom of my travellingbag, and though I had been carrying about a few marks with me in case of necessity, I had given them all to my mother that morning when she wanted change. I was unable to ask my way either with the tongue or the pen. I had only a very slight acquaintance with German, derived from such books as "Ahn's Course," and others of a similar description. In vain I tried to recollect the German for railway station. I could not even remember to have learnt it. Only sentences from the exercises came back to my memory with a provoking persistence. Of what use was it to be reminded that "the cat is false, the dog is true," unless, indeed, I had by my side an animal so faithful and sagacious as to guide me, like a blind person, to the place where I would be? Nor did it matter to me that "the shoes of the gardener's wife were found," because they were not

enchanted like "the goloshes of Fortune," and would not obey my wishes even if I possessed them. It occurred to me to draw a train and show it to the first cabman I met, with the hope that he would comprehend me, but I discarded the notion immediately because it would be awkward to hire a cab without being able to pay the fare, and I might chance to miss my parents. I racked my brain with endeavours to think of a few intelligible words to write in my book, but it was of no avail, and I was just resolving to have recourse to English, knowing that the Germans are good linguists, and hoping by some special stroke of luck to find one who could understand me, when the words Englanderin and Verloren flashed into my mind. I was glad to remember even so little, and put my hand in my pocket for my book and pencil. To my horror my pocket was empty, save for a cambric handkerchief and an old letter from Dorcas. I had either left my book on board the boat, where I had it last, or had inadvertently put it into my handbag. This was an overwhelming mis-

fortune. All that remained to me was to make a mute appeal to some passer-by.

Always having had to sit silent in the company of others, has engendered a habit in me of studying physiognomy a great deal, and I have been seldom misled in my estimate of character. I could only hope that this faculty would stand me in good stead now, and that I should discriminate wisely in making my dumb inquiry. There were so few people about that I concluded I must have come into some unfrequented quarter of the town. I scanned every one as carefully as the twilight admitted, but no one passed who inspired me with confidence. At length I saw approaching me an elderly gentleman. He paused under a street lamp, and gave me an opportunity of subjecting him to a rigorous if brief scrutiny; a plump, little man in a long black coat, with a large but kindly face, smooth and round like a fat little boy's; he wore goldrimmed spectacles, and his white hair was brushed back behind his ears, and descended nearly to his collar. I noticed also that his hat had a black band

almost covering it, and secured in its place by small black-headed pins, which glistened in the lamplight. The band was assuredly a sign of mourning, and I augured well from it, if his heart were in a softened condition, he would be the better able to feel for me. I was on the point of attracting his attention when I became aware of the reason for his standing still so long; it was to fill and light his pipe. As soon as this was done he threw away the still burning match - an ordinary wooden one. I pounced upon it, and with its charred end scrawled on Dorcas's envelope, "Englanderin - Verloren."

By this time he had walked away, with short, brisk steps; but I tore after him, and had the temerity to pat him on the shoulder. He turned sharply, and looked, as Dickens has described one of his characters, "fit for the figure-head of a ship to be called the Astonishment." He said something, which, of course, I could neither hear nor answer, shook his head, and was moving on. Did he imagine that I, Evelyn Sylvestre, was a beggar? But

I had no time to reflect; I was growing desperate, and pulling him back to the lamp, I thrust the envelope into his hand. He looked puzzled, and screwed his lips into a funny expression of perplexity, then he stood irresolute for a minute or two, which seemed hours to me. Finally he turned in an opposite direction to that in which he was going, and beckoned to me to follow.

Now that I began to see a way out of my difficulty, I could not help seeing a spice of fun in my adventure. I was on the tiptoe of expectation.

Where was I going? What would happen to me? We trotted along mutely side by side. Soon we came to gardens similar to those I had passed in the early part of my walk. Had he by some transmission of thought guessed that I wanted to go to the railway station, and was he taking me there? No, he stopped suddenly before a large white house; there was just enough light for me to see that it had an imposing front with many windows and a fine entrance; he ascended a few steps and rang the bell. I was too excited to feel shy.

From the size and appearance of this mansion, I expected the ring to be answered by a lordly footman in plush; but the door was opened by a stout woman, with a broad, but good-tempered face - presumably a servant; she wore no cap, but had her hair coiled in thick braids at the back of her head; she had on a dark blue striped jacket, gathered in at the waist by the band of her stuff apron, and a skirt of some woollen material. She and my conductor discoursed with some animation, emphasising their remarks with sundry nods and jerks. They talked long enough for me to notice that we were in a spacious, paved hall, hung with pictures and trophies of the chase, and far back I saw a wide stone staircase. Presently the servant opened a door, and motioned to me to enter and sit down. Then she and the old gentleman disappeared. I found myself in a luxuriously-appointed apartment, which, judging by the furniture, was a diningroom; the floor was of some light wood polished to slipperiness; wainscot lined the lower half of the walls, and terminated about six or seven feet from the ground in a broad shelf which ran round the entire room. On it were ranged curious glass flagons with silver lids, and china of almost every description: dumpy jugs, tall vases, quaintly-shaped mugs and cups, and huge plates.

On an elaborately carved sideboard were set several drinking-glasses of the palest green, engraved round the rim. A large brass stove, as bright as gold, occupied one corner. The ceiling was partitioned off into panels, each compartment being enriched with a painting. At one end of the room hung a heavy velvet portière.

I was continuing my observations when the portière parted to admit the old gentleman and another, taller and younger than himself, probably not more than fifty years of age. He had a most benevolent and pleasing face: blue eyes beaming with amiability, and a smile which lit up his otherwise rather homely countenance. He had, to all appearances, been disturbed at a meal, for he had his serviette in his hand, and was wiping his moustache with it as he

entered. He began to talk to me, but my only reply was to sign for writing materials.

He disappeared between the portières, and returned, carrying a massive inkstand of oxidised silver, a pen, and some paper; and then our conversation began in earnest. He explained to me that the old gentleman, who was a friend of his, had guessed that I wanted some one who could speak English, and had brought me to him, as he had lived some years in London. I described as briefly as I could the accident that had befallen me, and entreated him to let some one show me the way to the station. I added that I was impatient to be gone, as I knew I must cause my parents great alarm by my absence. But he took it very leisurely.

"I will go with you myself," he wrote; " but there is no train yet - not one until half-past nine o'clock. I know all about the Homburg trains." Poor man, perhaps he wanted to finish his supper! "Now you must come and let me introduce you to my wife."

I would gladly have dispensed with

this ceremony. My only anxiety was to get back to my parents. The excitement which had been buoying me up so far was ebbing away very fast, and now that there was no longer any necessity for me to exercise my fortitude, I felt myself on the verge of tears; but I could not decline his invitation.

All this time, my little friend stood smiling and nodding, as if he thought he had done a very clever thing indeed in bringing me there.

Then we all three passed between the portières, and entered another smaller room, just as beautiful in its way as the other, but differing from it in the style of its decorations and furniture. I could only bestow a hurried glance upon it, but it seemed half library, half boudoir, having low bookcases and a profusion of elegant trifles scattered about, while a work-basket and some half-finished knitting denoted feminine occupation.

My host led the way, carrying the inkstand and paper; I followed, and the old gentleman brought up the rear. We walked quickly through this pretty room, and out by a French window into a gar-

den, which I saw, by a few little lamps placed here and there, was filled with rose trees. Though it was late in the season, many were still in bloom, while in June it must have been a perfect bower of roses. After traversing one or two short paths, we reached an alcove large enough to contain several chairs and a table, on which supper was spread.

A lady was seated there, and a young man, who might possibly be her son. At a word from her husband she rose and shook hands with me, and hearing of my difficulty, wrote a few friendly sentences in excellent English. She was not the least German in type, being tall and slender, with dark eyes and hair. She looked exceedingly refined and intelligent.

They invited me to join them at supper. My kind old guide, whom my adventure had doubtless kept from his home, was already seated and busy enough. He appeared to be eating meat from one plate and stewed plums from another, as we eat red currant jelly with mutton, or apple sauce with goose. On the table stood a large tureen, which I was surprised to find did not contain soup but wine, with fruit floating in it. They ladled some out into a pretty glass mug, and insisted upon my drinking it. I could not refuse it, although I declined to eat anything. I was in a state of feverish impatience to join my parents, but politeness compelled me to wait until the interrupted supper was finished.

On taking my leave, the young man rose solemnly, placed his feet in the first position, and made me a profound obeisance, which disconcerted me not a little.

I was greatly surprised to find a carriage waiting to convey me to the station, and here at last I arrived without further disaster, escorted by both the gentlemen.

I found my parents in a terrible state of perturbation, afraid to leave the spot in search of me lest they should miss me. My father had worried himself till he was almost ill, and my mother was divided between her efforts to quiet him and to conceal her own fears. The kindness I had received from strangers quite thawed my father's English iciness.

He was profuse in his thanks, and an exchange of visiting cards ensued.

We found subsequently that the one was a Frankfort merchant of high reputation, the other a physician of some eminence; so I had had the good fortune to fall into safe hands. They would not leave us until we were in the train, and then they stood on the platform bowing and smiling as we departed.

After that I shrank back into a corner of the carriage. I had not felt so like a naughty child since I was little, and I arrived at Homburg in a very subdued frame of mind.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

They sleep sweet sleep who die, A sleep without a dream, The floating of an oarless boat On an untroubled stream.

EDWIN HATCH.

WE found it was the custom at Homburg to take rooms, and to go out to hotels and restaurants for all meals except breakfast.

We were fortunate in soon finding pretty apartments in the Untere Promenade. They were not far from the springs. We had only a long avenue to walk through before we emerged upon what I may call the scene of action. There were several springs, but some were much more affected than others, notably the "Elizabethan" and the "Ludwigs."

Here the people met at seven o'clock in the morning, drank two or three glasses of very nasty water at short intervals, strolling up and down the leafy walks between each draught, talking to friends, and listening to the strains of the band. The waters are credited with possessing a petrifying quality upon vegetable matter, and a bouquet which had been steeped in them was placed in a glass case near the bandstand. It certainly looked very stony, and was exhibited there as a warning to all who might feel an unholy craving for salad or uncooked fruit while undergoing the course. It showed what might be expected to happen to any one indulging in such excesses.

By nine o'clock the place was deserted, everyone hurrying home through the avenues, where the rose-sellers had pitched their little portable stalls covered with red calico. They combined with flowers quite a brisk sale of glass jars of honey, which the water-drinkers carried home as an addition to their meagre breakfast, butter being in many cases prohibited to those under treatment.

In the afternoon there was more imbibing, but the libations were not so copious. It was customary then to drink

a small quantity from an iron spring as a tonic.

Twice a week my father had to undergo a pine bath. For twenty minutes, duly registered by a sand measure, he had to steep himself in a thick liquid the hue of coffee, highly aromatic, and enlivened by little spikes of fir needles.

Luncheon was sometimes taken at a conditorei's, and consisted largely of very sweet cakes, tarts, and chocolate, with a mixture of eggs.

In the afternoon, the second bout of water-drinking religiously performed, a drive was permitted.

Dinner in the various hotels was served between six and seven o'clock, the dishes provided being in strict accordance with the doctor's prescriptions. The appetite was never tempted by so much as the sight of forbidden delicacies.

In the evening the visitors assembled in the gardens of the Kursaal, where the band played again for an hour or two. I found it very droll and entertaining to watch the band, the players seemed to make so much exertion with so little result. The awful solemnity

upon the countenances of some led you to believe they were the victims of a secret sorrow, while the contortions into which others screwed their faces and bodies, whether fiddling or blowing, often suggested suffering; but as the people seemed to enjoy listening, I suppose it was pleasant to hear.

By ten o'clock everyone was tired out, and retired to rest, as they had to be astir again very early in the morning. Almost as soon as it was light the tiny carts, with their burden of milk cans—as at Coblentz, drawn by patient-looking dogs—arrived from the country.

We had been at Homburg about three days when, on returning from our afternoon drive, we observed a cab at the door with a large quantity of very English-looking luggage. Three people had just alighted — an elderly gentleman, a lady, and a very pretty girl — the exact counterpart of our own party.

My father and the gentleman stared hard at one another, and then almost rushed into each other's arms. Then my mother and the lady were introduced. I hung back with an access of my usual

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shyness, but my father pulled me forward, and soon I had the young girl's hands in mine, and the sweetest eyes in the world fixed questioningly on my face. My mother gave me to understand that it was a General Mildmay, with his wife and daughter Hilda. The General was a schoolfellow and very old friend of my father's, but they had not met for many years, as he had been with his regiment in India. He had now come to Homburg to recruit after a long residence in a tropical climate.

His daughter was the most lovely person I had ever seen; lovely from ever-varying expression more than strict regularity of features. She was above the middle height and very graceful, her head beautifully shaped, her hair drawn back in thick wavy bands from a brow white as alabaster, hair that sometimes looked an ordinary chestnut brown, but, catching the sunshine or firelight, warmed to a deep ruddy gold. Her eyes changed with each passing feeling; sometimes they were sparkling with fun, at others brimful of tenderness. Her nose appeared to be faultlessly straight when

her face was in repose, but if any merry thought diverted her, there was just a suspicion of its being retroussé. Her lips were red and delicately curved, while her smile waked up the most bewitching little dimples. I always thought it must be accompanied by rippling laughter.

I used to see her amongst a long row of people at the table-d'hôte, and her brilliant colouring made everyone else look wan and faded by comparison. I noticed that though her dress was simple, it was always in perfect taste, and suitable to the occasion; on hot days it suggested coolness, on damp or chilly days, warmth. I felt countrified and awkward beside her. My own good looks seemed to be totally eclipsed by her beauty, and I wondered how I could ever have had the vanity to suppose I was more than passable.

The Mildmays had taken apartments in the same house as ourselves, so that for the next three weeks we were likely to be a great deal in each other's company.

My father was delighted to meet his

old friend again; it was like a renewal of his youth to talk over the days when they were at Rugby together. My mother appeared to like Mrs. Mildmay; it only remained for Hilda and myself to set up a friendship on our own account, and this we very speedily did. We were about the same age in years, but she was far older in experience; she had all the little complaisant ways which are early learnt in society.

At first I could not help feeling the contrast between her ease of manner and my own constraint, but she was so charming, so sweet and sympathetic, that it soon wore off. She wrote rapidly, and had quite an intuitive perception in divining what I would say, so that in addition to my admiration for her and the appeal her gracious beauty made to my artistic taste, I felt grateful to her for contributing so much to my amusement. I had never had a girl friend before. My nearest approach to one had been the wife of a minor canon, whose acquaintance I had made when taking my drawing lessons. She was young, and we painted together occa-

sionally, but we met seldom, as she had a delicate little boy who engrossed much of her attention.

It was, therefore, delightful to find someone about my own age whose keen sense of fun could now and then surprise me into a burst of merriment, for there were a great many funny things at Homburg. The English element was very strong, and it was diverting to see how the good people had brought away their insular prejudices and peculiarities with them. They broke up into little cliques just as they would at home, and would look daggers at you if you attempted to appropriate a chair at the Kursaal which they were endeavouring to retain for one of their own set.

I was, undoubtedly, a great puzzle to them. As they had never heard me speak they could not discover my nationality, and Hilda determined that she would not betray me by talking on her fingers or writing when others were present. We had some pre-arranged signs, which sufficed for our mutual understanding when we were in public. She generally interposed at the tabled'hôte when anyone addressed me, and always managed to seat herself on the last of the chairs occupied by our party; but one day the arrangement of the table was unexpectedly altered, and I fell a prey to an inquisitive female. Hilda, sitting opposite to me, listened, and told me afterwards that my neighbour tried me by turns in very imperfect French, German, and Italian. Then she appeared to have reached the end of her vocabulary, and as I merely bowed each time and shook my head, she was completely baffled.

We had not known each other long before we made a pleasant discovery, which was that Thurstan Rivers' father and General Mildmay had been old friends, and the two families were intimate; in fact, Thurstan had spent a month with them the previous year during the grouse shooting. I well recollected his glowing description of the Yorkshire moors.

The General quite warmed up at the mention of the name. When he heard the story of the fire he said the lad was always a plucky fellow from a child, and

was worthy of his sire, who was one of the bravest officers in the service, foremost in every position of danger; that the men under his command were ready to follow him to the cannon's mouth, he had such influence over them, and won their hearts as well as their obedience.

It was only to be expected that such a beautiful girl as Hilda should excite admiration amongst the visitors at Homburg, and very soon I discovered that a certain Mr. Trefusis was paying her marked attention. He had come with his mother, a pretty old widow lady, who was drinking the waters. Soon he became Hilda's shadow. No matter whether it was in the early morning at the springs, or at the conditorei's at luncheon, in the afternoon excursions, at the table-d'hôte dinner, to hear the band at the Kursaal in the evening, wherever Hilda was, there was he. He was very good-looking (of course not to compare with Thurstan), appeared to be very agreeable, and we were told he had a handsome fortune. He must have been a mine of wealth to the flowergirls, for he loaded her with the most

lovely bouquets. I was surprised at Hilda's genuine distress whenever they arrived.

I asked her the reason.

- "It is absolutely hopeless," she wrote.
- "But he seems very nice," remonstrated I.
- "That is why I am so sorry for him."
- "Why?" was my next question.
 Is there anyone else?"
- "Don't ask me;" and she crimsoned so painfully that I was convinced there was.
- "Are you already engaged?" I persisted, for my curiosity was aroused.

She shook her head gravely and decidedly, and though I was dying to know more, I could hardly pursue the subject, which she always adroitly avoided in the future.

The time at Homburg seemed to fly, and our three weeks had already been extended to a month. We had made the most of it. We had taken all the prescribed drives and excursions in the neighbourhood as conscientiously as my father and the General had taken their

baths and tumblers of water. We had been to Konigstein, wandering about the ruins of the castle and through the beautiful forest, already touched with the first breath of autumn. We had gone to the Roman camp at Saalburg, where I was in time to see some of the pottery dug out under my own eyes—veritable Roman vases, which I wished our potters at home could examine.

We now began to think of turning our faces homewards, with one or two halts on the way. The Mildmays were going to Paris, then to the Riviera for the winter. They did not contemplate returning to their home in Yorkshire until the edge was taken off an English spring; at least that was how the General, who was a thorough Anglo-Indian, put it. Hilda was to pay us a visit in the early summer, and I was to go to them. So we proposed to continue a friendship which had quickly ripened into intimacy.

Already we were beginning to collect our little possessions, so as not to leave too much to do at the last. Two days, and then Homburg would know us no

more. I was in my room packing my sketches, which I intended to place at the bottom of my trunk, when my mother came in with an open letter in her hand.

I saw immediately that something unusual had happened; she, who was habitually so calm and self-possessed, had tears standing in her eyes. I took the letter from her, feeling sure that it must contain the cause of her concern; and there, to my infinite regret, I read that our dear, faithful Peter was no more. He had not felt well when we left home, but no one had been uneasy about him; and the doctor was not called in until it was too late.

My mother was ready to reproach herself for being absent. It grieved her to think that she, who tended the whole village, should have been away when her trusty old servant lay dying. Dorcas had written a prim but sorrowful letter in her best stiff copy-book hand, dwelling upon Peter's last hours, and putting in one or two scriptural applications. She also inquired what was to be done about a new man. My father had left

a great deal to Peter of late years, and his sudden death would throw things into confusion. So all hope of lingering on the journey was abandoned, and we determined to go home without unnecessary delay.

For reasons of my own, I was not sorry to return. Beyond a letter of thanks to my mother soon after he left us, we had heard nothing of Thurstan, and I was thirsting for news of him.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

There is no other call,
From wind to wave, from rose to asphodel,
Than Love's alone — the thing we cannot quell,
Do what we will, from font to funeral.

Love-letters of a Violinist.

THE winter passed with little worthy of record. We missed Peter more and more as the days went by. We had never realised until he was gone how much had been left to his thoughtful care. Spencer, the new man, was irreproachable; but he was not Peter, that was all.

I paid frequent visits to Phœbe (Peter's widow). Poor woman! she seemed so desolate, and the little cottage looked empty without the old man; but she bore it with a certain quiet dignity, and we did all we could to console her.

In stormy weather, of which we had a great deal, I spent much time in my

attic, practising type-raising with my little Braille frame, making extracts from my favourite authors, and endeavouring to put my own thoughts into shape for future transcription. In the gloaming I sat by the flickering firelight, pondering over the tangled thread of our complex human existence, and building strange castles in the air, with one person ever the central figure.

On fine days I would go out, and retrace every footstep of the way Thurstan and I had walked together, pausing wherever we had stopped to rest, and recalling every word of our conversation during our rambles. I longed with a desperate longing, which grew into a passionate prayer, for the Divine voice to utter its merciful "Ephphatha" in my ears. But of what avail?

There was no apparent alteration in my life; but I felt that the experience of the summer had widened my mental horizon, and that I was becoming more like other people. I read as much as ever, but works of a different character. My father, too, had roused himself since Peter's death, poring less over

such works as "Synthetic Philosophy,"
"Social and Religious Evolution," and
quite neglecting his compilation of words
from the Sanscrit. He was giving his
attention to practical matters instead,
and seemed much better for it.

I heard from Hilda very often—a cheerful correspondent, who sent me all sorts of amusing descriptions of life in the Riviera.

Now and then we received a letter from Thurstan Rivers; he had no plea for returning to our neighbourhood, his mother having gone to some place on the south coast for the winter. He was still working very hard, but seemed sanguine, and said he was looking forward to seeing us all again some day.

Winter had given place to spring, and Maundy Thursday arrived — a lovely April day.

Whatever cloud hung over the church all was sunshine out of doors. Nature looked gay, and it was a joy to live.

I had promised to get a basketful of moss for the Easter decorations. It was early for it, but I knew a sheltered spot where it might be found, and set off

to the wood, trowel in hand. I had dug up a quantity, and was strolling homewards. I never took that walk without having my thoughts filled with the memory of my first meeting with Thurstan; thoughts tinged even yet with a certain amount of shame and vexation at my own stupidity on that occasion.

I was nearing the spot where I had established myself with my sketching apparatus on that eventful morning, when my heart gave a great bound and then seemed to suddenly stand still, for Thurstan himself was approaching me; there could be no mistake. There was no one else in the world like him. He came along with his buoyant step as if hope were in the ascendant and all the world were fair.

Surprised in the midst of my recollections of him, an absurd bashfulness took possession of me. My first impulse was to turn and flee, but he was too near for me to do that; I had no alternative but to go on. It flashed through my mind that I was destined to make myself ridiculous at that particular spot. We shook hands. He looked inquiringly at

me, started a little, and then became very grave. Glancing up timidly, I saw that his eyes were turned towards the distant hills, as if he hardly saw them; his whole attitude betokened some mental conflict, the line in his forehead deepened, and there was a new expression in his face, tender, pitiful.

He took out his note-book, and seemed to be hesitating about what he should write, and after some deliberation only wrote a few words. My agitation was so uncontrollable that I could scarcely read what he had written; the lines ran into one another, and danced up and down; but with a supreme effort I steadied myself, and found simply a commonplace question:

"Are you so glad to see me?"

How could I answer? Glad—rejoiced! What words could I find to give the faintest idea of my feelings? I could not reply; my fingers trembled so violently that I could neither trust myself to speak upon them or to write. Instead, I clutched nervously at the moss I had been at such pains to collect, and tore it fibre from fibre.

Then he seated himself beside me, and possessing himself of the book, continued to write.

"Is it possible that you care for me? that I could be the means of bringing any happiness into your life?"

I bent my head still lower over my basket.

"I do not know how to believe it," he added; "but if it is so, I swear to devote my whole life to your service."

Bending towards me, he took my face between both his hands, and compelled me to look up at him. Gazing down, down into the very depths of my soul, he must have read the answer in my eyes, for he drew me to him, and kissed me gently, reverently, as if he were sealing some solemn compact.

For the moment my heart was too bursting with gladness to have a fear for the future. The wealth of happiness which was suddenly mine was sufficient to outweigh all else. It was a joy too deep for words. Now all doubts were dispelled by happy certainty, though it seemed almost impossible to believe that I had inspired a man like Thurstan with

this feeling. Was it his own royal nature which was chivalrous to all who were weak?—compassionate to all who were in need of sympathy?

For the first time in my life, earth's many voices seemed audible to me. I felt as if I could hear the twitter of the birds as they flew from bough to bough above our heads. It was but the singing of my own heart, yet the fancy pleased me.

All Nature sang together, and the burden of the song was Love. The sunshine had tempted a bee to come out; surely he must be humming the same tune. Two butterflies were chasing each other, and the flutter of their wings must whisper Love. The brown fronds of the ferns were just peeping above the warm earth. Would they, too, expand into feathery greenness under the magic spell of Love? It sighed through the tall pine trees; it played with a tender rustle through the grey, drooping leaves of the willow by the brook. I had been told that there was an echo in yonder valley. Could I but give it that charmed word, it would

repeat it with delicious persistency, not seven times, but till seventy times seven. I read it in every blade of grass; it was reflected in the blue water; it sparkled in the dewdrops; it made the sunshine more golden. Wherever I turned it was there, because I carried it in my own bosom. It rang in ears that were deaf; it trembled on lips that were mute.

Some children passed us; they were in search of primroses and wild blue hyacinths. They recalled us to some recollection of the hour. It was time to return to the house.

Our path lay past old Phœbe's cottage. She was standing in the doorway, and curtsied, then she smiled a pathetic little smile, sadder than tears. Poor soul! did something about us two touch a chord of memory, and remind her of herself and Peter in the far-off past?

That afternoon Thurstan had an interview with my parents, at which I was present. It seemed terribly prosaic after the scene of the morning, although I could only gather what was said. They pointed out, as wise people no doubt

would, all the obstacles. Thurstan owned he had spoken prematurely, but as we were both young, if I were willing, we could afford to wait until he had made his way. They replied that it was not so much a question of means; I should inherit all they possessed in time, and for the present they could make us a suitable allowance, but they considered my dumbness too great a drawback to be overcome. Thurstan argued that it was not so in his case, that if he were the owner of a great name and large estates, and his wife had to share his social obligations, then it might be an objection; but for a barrister occupied in dingy law-courts, what could it matter so long as he married the woman he loved, and who loved him? His mind was quite made up. It could not signify to anyone else so long as we were happy. I believe my mother secretly favoured us. She had often dwelt anxiously upon my future, for, as I had no near relations, she could not help asking herself who would care for and protect me when she and my father had passed over to join the great majority.

But my father was inexorable. Was it possible that he thought Thurstan too quixotic? He would recognise no engagement, although he was forced to admit he could not prevent our making any promises we pleased to one another, and with this we had to be satisfied. We regarded ourselves as strictly pledged to each other as if the announcement had appeared in the Society column of the Morning Post.

Thurstan had to leave early in the evening, and we should not have any opportunity of meeting again for some time. Work was to be his motto, he said, and work with such an end in view would give him renewed zeal.

The sadness of parting was quickly succeeding the ecstasy of meeting.

We strolled back to the wood for our silent farewell. Already the sun had set, and a cold mist was creeping up the valley, shrouding dear old Peter's grave in the little churchyard below, and blotting out the view. The flowers the children had scattered in their morning walk lay withering on the path. A sudden chill gathered round my heart

as, after one last embrace, Thurstan turned and left me. He looked back, and waved to me from time to time, and I watched his retreating figure, with eyes that were dim with tears, till at length he was lost to sight in the deepening twilight.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

Twist ye, twine ye, even so Mingle shades of joy and woe, Hope and fear, and peace and strife, In the thread of human life.

WALTER SCOTT.

I WAS almost afraid to wake up the next morning lest I should find that the events of the previous day were no events at all but merely the fond folly of my own imagination transported into the land of dreams, so unreal did it all appear; but it is wonderful how soon we can adapt ourselves to new circumstances.

In a few days everything seemed quite natural, and looking back I could hardly believe that there was a time when I had not known Thurstan, so essential a part of my existence had he now become.

I was intensely happy, and looked out at my world through rose-coloured spectacles.

Only now and then I was assailed by doubts. My parents' attitude puzzled me sorely, and was the first rift within the lute. I could not understand their objection. I felt sure that Thurstan must be a son-in-law after their own hearts, and yet they continued to shake their heads and look anxious.

I had been so tutored to regard their wishes as law that it was not easy to oppose them now, but I only yielded to them so far as to keep the engagement profoundly secret. This was not so difficult as it might appear, because we had so few neighbours and acquaintances that we were not subjected to the same amount of gossip and speculation which must be the lot of people living in towns, and as Thurstan would be at Oxford for some months longer, we should not be seen together.

No date had been fixed for our marriage. It would be time enough to think of that a long while hence, and I could only hope my parents would have become quite reconciled by that time.

I progressed steadily with my Braille work. Every little duty acquired a

new dignity, and I did not forget to visit the pottery. When I found that the wife of one of the men working there was ill, I went to see her. A little of my old reluctance to meet strangers sometimes troubled me, although a great deal of it had worn off during the past year; but for Thurstan's sake I must accustom myself to seeing new faces, no matter in what class of life. It would reflect upon his taste if others found me shy and awkward. The poor woman was very ill, hardly likely to recover. We made strong soup and jelly for her, and as her bedding was insufficient, my mother suggested sending her a large pillow. I could not carry all these things myself, so I took Hester, our young housemaid, to help me.

I shall never forget the poor creature's gratitude. She must have been pretty once, before poverty and suffering robbed her of her good looks; it was very touching to see her; she took my hand in both her own wasted ones and smiled—that sweet smile that I have read is often seen on the faces of the dying. She nestled her head in the pillow, so

much softer than the wretched one she had before, and tried to convey to me how comfortable it was.

I felt very thoughtful and sad when I left the cottage, and when Hester led the way home by another road, I acquiesced readily, not caring much about it. I was absorbed in my own reflections, thinking how hard it would be for that poor woman to leave her little children and her husband, who was kind to her with a sort of clumsy tenderness.

I never suspected Hester of any motive in taking that particular road, though I was convinced afterwards that she had one. Her own family lived in the district, so she was as well acquainted with it as myself. We walked along side by side for some time, then she turned down a shady lane, which I knew led to a sort of clearing in the woods, where people were in the habit of picnicking. Arrived there, I saw that this must have been the case quite recently. There were greasy papers still lying about, and the charred wood and ashes of a fire. The circle was a large one, grass-grown, and surrounded by hazel

trees, a pretty enough place for the purpose. I knew that an old woman who professed to tell fortunes lived in a miserable shanty not far off, and hovered about when there were visitors to pick up the remnants of the feast and any money they would give her. I had sometimes seen her, and given her a few pence, though she was so degraded and dirty that I shrank from contact with her.

She must have been on the watch now, for she appeared quite suddenly from behind the trees, and an expression I caught upon Hester's face showed me she was pleased. She beckoned to the woman, who did not want a second bidding, but came hobbling up; and in spite of reproving looks from me, Hester put a silver threepenny piece in her hand, and stood open-mouthed while the old crone held forth.

I suppose there was something infectious about it, for, notwithstanding my own disgust, I actually found myself a few minutes later offering her a shilling, and letting her hold my hand in her own grimy one. I gave Hester a glance, as

much as to say, "Listen, and tell me about it afterwards," and meanwhile watched the woman's countenance myself. At first she grinned and nodded knowingly, and seemed to be talking very fast, then she held up my hand for closer examination, and frowned ominously. She was evidently predicting that dreadful things were about to happen to me. It gave me an unpleasant sensation, and I was heartily relieved when she released my hand.

She had no doubt prophesied very favourably for Hester, as her face wore an ecstatic smile all the way home. I took her straight up to the attic and put a sheet of paper before her, upon which I had first written, "Write down every word you can remember of what that woman said."

Hester demurred. I insisted.

She wrote, "I'm no scholar, miss."

"Never mind the spelling," I replied.
"Just write it your own way."

Thus pressed, she took the pen and wrote: "She said a fine young gentleman was very fond of you."

I noticed that the writing was fairly

good, though rather cramped, and that the spelling was correct, therefore it was an idle excuse about being "no scholar." She did not seem inclined to write any more, but I stood over her with a determined air, so she added: "And you are very fond of him."

I grew impatient. This was something I knew very well already. I signed to her to continue.

"A fair woman would come between you."

A stop - more goading from me.

"You would behave right and honourable, because you are a sweet young lady."

I mentally answered, "I hope so."

"Then she muttered awful, and I could n't make out what she said; indeed I could n't, miss." The last after gestures of unbelief on my part.

I could get no more out of her, and let her go. I was angry with myself for

dwelling upon it at all.

I was still a good deal taken up with the potter's poor wife, who daily grew worse. She looked forward to my visits. I suppose when people are suf-

fering they have an intuitive knowledge of those who are in sympathy with them, and though I could speak no words of peace to the soul already hovering on the confines of eternity, I could smooth her pillow, hold a little nourishment to the pinched lips, and do many little things for her comfort. I always took the children a few cakes or cheap toys, so that they learned to look for my coming. It was a satisfaction to me to know that I was welcome. My own happiness was so abounding that I seemed to have some brimming over for the joy of others.

At last the end came. I felt very subdued. It was my first acquaintance with death, as I was in Germany when poor old Peter died, and I was glad to think that in a very short time I might expect a visit from Hilda. I would busy myself by setting everything straight before she arrived, so as to devote all my time to her. I began by turning out all my papers, which had got into some disorder, when I came upon Hester's non-sensical scribble. Again I was seized with the same unpleasant sensation I

had experienced when I was in the presence of the silly old fortune-teller. With a wave of indignation at my own weakness, I tore up the paper and flung it aside.

What could an ignorant woman, such as she, who traded upon the credulity of idle holiday-makers, know about my fate, whether it would be happy or tragic? Surely to be deaf and dumb strewed thorns enough in my path, while as for present happiness, what could the heart of woman desire more than to be loved by such a man as Thurstan Rivers? The future could take care of itself. So I bade myself take courage, and quieted the vague fear which, for one brief moment, had raised a little cloud upon my horizon.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

The setting of a great hope is like the setting of the sun — the brightness of our life is gone.

Longfellow's Prose.

THE hawthorns had shed their snowy petals, and given place to the tender foliage of early summer.

Hilda had been with us three weeks. At the particular request of my parents, I had not informed her of the understanding between Thurstan and myself, though it had often been difficult to refrain from doing so, or to restrain my impatience from opening his letters when she was present.

My love and admiration for her grew with our acquaintance. I pleased myself by picturing her as a leader of the society she was so fitted to adorn. Fortune and Nature alike had so far favoured her. She was well-born, perfectly educated, had beauty of person, and

sweet and gracious manners. I wondered whether the man to whom she
had given her heart could be worthy of
her. We never alluded to that conversation at Homburg, seeming rather by
mutual consent to avoid the subject, so
I knew no more than before. It had
been a real happiness to me to have her
with me; but all good things come to
an end, and this was the last day of her
visit.

We were at breakfast, and the postbag had arrived, and brought newspapers and letters — not one for me, and only two or three for my father, and those only brief business ones, which were very quickly disposed of, so that he was very soon buried in the newspaper.

Presently I noticed that he was reading aloud to the others, evidently something very terrible, for my mother and Hilda, who sat opposite to me, were listening to him with an expression of horror on their faces. Then he ceased reading, and they made some comments amongst themselves.

After a short pause, he began to read

again. This time they listened with a look of blank astonishment, mingled with some embarrassment on the part of Hilda. I am so accustomed to watch the countenances of those about me, that I can almost get a clue to their thoughts; and as my curiosity was aroused, I observed Hilda very attentively. Her usual composure had deserted her; she played uneasily with her serviette ring, did not taste the toast she had just buttered, or even break the egg to which she had helped herself some minutes before; her eyes fell when they encountered mine fixed inquiringly upon her, and she became red and pale by turns.

Some instinct told me that the news to some extent concerned myself, for, turning to my mother, I caught rather an anxious glance directed towards me; her usual placidity was ruffled also. But how could any event in the great world affect me? I had so few outside interests — only Thurstan. But stay! he had not written! I stretched out my hand eagerly for the paper. It seemed ages before my father, who was now

deep in a review, passed it to me. There I saw, in conspicuously large letters:

"Appalling railway accident in Switzerland. Collapse of a bridge. More than two hundred persons killed and injured."

I breathed freely again. Thurstan was quite safe at Oxford. It was most melancholy for the poor people, and my heart ached as I read the harrowing details; but my beloved was not amongst them, and I experienced a sensation of unbounded relief.

I was returning the paper to my father, when he drew my attention to another paragraph, which had escaped me. This is how it ran:—

"We deeply regret to announce that the Earl of Kennerleigh and his only surviving son, Lord Champneys, are amongst the victims of the lamentable railway catastrophe in Switzerland (reported in another column). His Lordship had been abroad some months, and was on the eve of returning to England. We understand that by these sudden and most unexpected deaths, the family honours and estates devolve upon a distant cousin — Thurstan Rivers, Esq., of Merton College, Oxford, eldest son of the late Colonel Rivers, R. E."

My instinct had not misled me; there was something in the paper which concerned me. I raised my eyes suddenly and met those of Hilda. She coloured and looked away, and addressed some remark to my mother, who did not lose her anxious expression.

We were all too much astonished to continue long at breakfast, when, just as we were leaving the table, the telegraph boy arrived with a message from Thurstan. It said:—

"Called away suddenly by the accidental death of two relations in Switzerland. Much hurried. Will write."

If any lingering doubt had remained in our minds, the telegram dispelled it.

My head was in a whirl—joy that one I loved so dearly should have honour and wealth; but it must be honour and wealth unshared by me. One sentence stood out with startling clearness before my mind's eye, written in Thurstan's distinct hand.

"If I were the owner of a great name and large estates, and my wife had to share my social obligations, there might be an objection."

I knew sadly, but not the less surely, that this had now come to pass. And I had made another discovery which filled me with dismay. By one of those flashes of inspiration which have come to me occasionally, I knew just as surely that the man whom Hilda loved was none other than Thurstan Rivers. In her agitation at the unexpected news she had been thrown off her guard for one brief moment, and had drawn aside the veil with which she so carefully concealed her feelings, and I had penetrated her secret. With the wisdom born of sorrow, I now recalled numberless instances, unnoticed at the time, but sufficient now to confirm my suspicions.

Was it possible that she thought he had been merely waiting until he was in circumstances to declare himself, and that there would no longer be any impediment? Would the same event raise her to the highest heaven of hope, and

cast me down to the lowest abyss of despair?

I had now a double motive for adopting the course which all my nobler impulses commanded me to pursue, but at first it was impossible to reflect calmly about it.

Hilda had apparently recovered her usual serenity. I do not think she was conscious of having betrayed her feelings to me, neither did she seem to have guessed mine. I went to her room to help her to collect her gloves and hand-kerchiefs, and place them in the delicately-perfumed sachets; then I sent Dorcas to her to fold her dresses, and assist in packing them.

By this means I was able to secure a little solitude for myself, and stole away to my attic.

There I sat down to review the situation, and to make some attempts at arranging my disordered thoughts.

A flood of recollections swept over me, and raised all sorts of questions in my mind.

Step by step I went over the circumstances of my engagement, until an idea

too horrible to be borne made me hide my face although I was alone.

Thurstan knew Hilda before he ever saw me; had he loved her then, and had he merely proposed to me from the pity that is akin to love? Had the glamour of my own love blinded me? Out of its fervour and fulness had I invested him with a feeling he did not possess, and by showing him how deeply my affections were involved, led him on, all unwittingly, to sacrifice himself and her for some false notion of honour?

My father had opposed it from the first. Was it possible that he had discerned some undercurrent of feeling, heard some ring of regret in his voice which was lost upon me, but which led him to suspect that he was obeying a hasty impulse to be afterwards repented of?

Oh! the miserable, burning shame of it all. I could never look in his face again. How thankful I ought to be that this accession to honour and wealth furnished me with an abundant pretext for releasing him without further explanation.

I had a struggle to keep back the passionate tears which rose to my eyes, but at last I regained sufficient outward composure to venture downstairs and spend the last few hours of Hilda's visit with her.

Her luggage was dispatched by the donkey-cart. We were to follow afterwards in the pony-carriage, Spencer driving us. In fine weather we preferred this arrangement to having a fly from the town. She was going to Clifton for a few days, and from thence to join her parents in their home amongst the purple moors of Yorkshire.

Just as we were starting, my father came to the door with a list of stationery and books which he wished me to get at Burrough's shop on my way back; then followed adieux from him and my mother, and we set off.

Talking is not easy while jolting over a stony road, even when one has the faculty of speech; it is next to impossible when any other means have to be employed, so it was not unnatural that we should refrain from conversation. Whenever we came to a few yards

where it was smooth, Hilda reiterated how happy she had been, how she was looking forward to seeing me at her own home in the autumn, and enjoined me to write often — the usual phrases which pass between friends who are on the eve of parting. To all of these I was able to reply by a nod or a smile.

She looked more beautiful than ever. Her face wore a new expression; the sweet mouth was the same as ever, but I noticed a light in her eyes I had not seen in them before. Hope or triumph perhaps. Could I be the one to dash that hope to the ground? No — a thousand times no.

I had plenty of time for thinking during the drive, and my thoughts dwelt upon the difficult task before me. I felt for once that I should be glad to escape the solicitude which I was sure I must expect from my mother. I wished to act entirely of my own accord, and though I might be sure of her approval in the step I intended to take, I wished to hide my inevitable suffering from her.

"Oh!" I kept inwardly exclaiming,

"if I could only be amongst strangers for even one short week!" but I could think of no plan to bring this about.

I own it was with unmixed relief that I saw Hilda depart. I could not have endured the strain many hours longer.

In returning from the station, we stopped at Burrough's for the paper and books. Spencer went in while I held the reins. I was thinking so deeply that I did not observe anyone I knew, until I felt a hand laid upon my shoulder, and turning, found Mrs. Nesbitt, the minor canon's wife, at my side. She jumped into the chaise beside me and began to scribble. She looked very animated about something. I watched her as she wrote, and read:—

"You are the very person I wanted to see. Jacky does not get strong quickly, and the doctor says he will not throw off the whooping-cough until he goes to the sea. My husband cannot leave; for, in addition to the services at the cathedral, he has promised to take some occasional duty. I should be so dull alone. Do come with me. I

think of taking the boy to the neighbourhood of Colwyn. It is a pretty country, and I am sure we could make some lovely sketches together. Tell Mrs. Sylvestre I was going to write to her to-day, and that she must spare you."

"I know my mother will be glad to let me go," I replied. "When do you start?"

"I am afraid you will think I am hurrying you dreadfully, but could you possibly be ready to leave by the eleven o'clock train the day after to-morrow?"

I nodded emphatically, and Spencer having completed his purchases, we parted.

I drove home in a calmer frame of mind, very thankful to have a prospect of carrying out my wishes:

The next day was employed in making the necessary preparations, and on the third, after a last clinging kiss on my dear mother's troubled face, I joined Mrs. Nesbitt at the railway station, Jacky in a perfect effervescence of delight, already provided with a spade, pail, and shrimping net.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

There shall never be one lost good.

What was - shall live as before.

The evil is null — is nought, is silence implying sound.

What was good shall be good with, for evil, so much good more.

On earth the broken arcs, In heaven the perfect round.

ROBERT BROWNING.

THERE were very few visitors at Colwyn. It was too early in the season, and we had, therefore, no difficulty in finding good rooms overlooking the bay.

Jacky and I had always been dear friends, but now we became something more. He used to be very nimble when first we went out in the morning, but the poor little weak legs would very soon tire, and as he utterly despised a mailcart, I used to catch him up in my

strong young arms and carry him home pig-a-back, which was not derogatory to his dignity.

No one can tell what it was to me to have this dear little creature nestling to my side, with his pretty, caressing ways. He was so quaint in his sayings that his mother would write them for me, trying to spell them in his baby language. One day I noticed that though she laughed very much at something he was saying to me she looked embarrassed, and at first refused to repeat it; I insisted, and could not help laughing myself when she wrote:

"Daddy says muvver talks too much, and all womins talk too much, but he would like 'ou, because 'ou never says nuffin at all."

He laid his little cheek upon my hand and rubbed it softly up and down. "I think 'ou is a very nice lady," he said, "'ou never say 'Naughty Jacky,' or 'Go away, Jacky,' or 'Be t'wiet, Jacky,' but 'ou play noughts and crosses with me ever so much."

Sometimes we went to the toy-shop together, where he did the talking and I

the spending. One day this had resulted in the purchase of an air-ball, but in returning home he tumbled down and broke it. I shall never forget his despair at seeing it collapse; his grief could not have been more poignant if he had seen life's dearest hopes shattered. After all, we are but children, and our troubles are only a question of comparison; the loss of an air-ball at four years old may seem as irreparable as the loss of a lover at twenty-four. So we mourn alike over the bubble which has burst. I watched his mother as she bent over him, kissing and consoling him, and no doubt promising him another, and an involuntary thought came into my mind - What a troubled look that sweet little face would wear if his mother ceased to speak! How must it be for children to listen in vain for their mother's voice?

Day by day the roses came back to Jacky's pale cheeks; day by day the roses fled from mine. I was getting accustomed to the look of infinite pain which I could not help seeing reflected in my glass. By degrees the careless

girl was giving place to the weary-eyed woman. I struggled to be brave when with Mrs. Nesbitt, but more than once she said she was afraid I was tiring myself with Jacky, or that Colwyn did not agree with me, I had grown so white and thin.

My mother had forwarded a telegram to me, which had arrived from Thurstan, telling me he was returning to Oxford, so it was time to write the letter I was nerving myself to compose. Many sleepless hours did I pass — now altering this sentence, now that.

A fierce gale during the night, succeeded by a stormy morning, gave me an opportunity of remaining indoors to write it. I shut myself in my own room, and determined that I would not leave it until my task was accomplished.

Delicacy forbade my mentioning Hilda. Their eminent suitability would assuredly make itself felt sooner or later, independently of the love I knew each cherished for the other. I could but be loyal to my friend, generous to my lover, and leave the rest to time and circumstance; but there were some lines of Christina

Rossetti's which he and I had read together. They came to me now with a deeper meaning, and I could not refrain from closing my letter with them —

"If there be any one can take my place
And make you happy whom I grieve to grieve,
Think not that I can grudge it, but believe
I do commend you to that fairer face,
That readier art than mine, that nobler grace."

I finished it and went downstairs, feeling that already half the bitterness was past.

Mrs. Nesbitt had a bad headache, so I gave Jacky his dinner, and returned to my room.

I sat gazing at the square white envelope with the unfamiliar name written upon it. Thurstan Rivers was already receding into the shadowy past, and this person with a high-sounding title was unknown to me. I knew that at first I must expect some opposition—that he was too honourable a man to accept his freedom without a protest—but I must be firm of purpose, and in the end I should prevail, and the time would come when he would bless me for it, and

would forgive the pain which I found it greater pain to inflict.

And when my own mind had recovered its elasticity, I should eagerly watch his career, and should rejoice over his success. He would be great because he had the element of greatness in him, not because he had inherited broad acres and a noble name.

All these and many more thoughts passed through my aching brain, when I suddenly became aware of Jacky standing before me. He looked at me wonderingly and shook his little head with the sage air often seen in children. I suppose he noticed the sadness of my eyes, which were heavy with tears. He produced a diminutive cotton square with a pink border from the pocket of his little sailor jacket, and walking soberly to the water-jug, which happened to be set upon the floor, he dipped in a corner of it, and clambering on my lap, pressed it tenderly on my eyelids - the tears were dangerously near them. After a while he seemed satisfied with the result, and went away, returning with his hat and

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spade and pail. Then he pointed to the letter, which lay on the table ready stamped, and brought me my sketch-book and camp-stool. It did not require much intelligence to guess his wishes.

"Yes, Jacky," I mentally replied, "it is fine now, and presently I will take you to the beach, and we will go to the Post-office, and I will lift you up that you may put my letter in the box. My innocent darling! you will little know what you have done. After that you shall go to the shore and paddle and dig while I make some pretence of sketching, and think out my own sad thoughts."

But first of all I would lock up my book as a page of my life turned down—some day it may reach those for whom it was intended—for, henceforth, the joys and sorrows of others must be my care. In the years to come I may "rise from my dead self to higher things." Thurstan has taught me how "to suffer and be strong;" but not yet. Ah! not yet—not until Time, the great consoler, has stilled the passionate pain in my

heart, and lulled to rest its weary love and longing.

[Postscript by the mother of Evelyn Sylvestre.]

I have found these papers amongst the cherished possessions of my beloved child. They bear evidence of having been written at intervals, and present a faithful record of her somewhat restricted life. The concluding sentences are the last she ever penned, indeed the ink could have been scarcely dry when the end came.

It seems that she carried out her intention of going out with Jacky, letting him put her letter in the post, and afterwards taking him to the beach. Here, I suppose, absorbed in her own sad reverie, with her eyes turned rather to the distant horizon than to the objects near her, she must have allowed her attention to stray from him. There were very few people about at that hour of the afternoon — none except a group of boatmen, lounging on higher ground, who, while smoking and gossiping, ob-

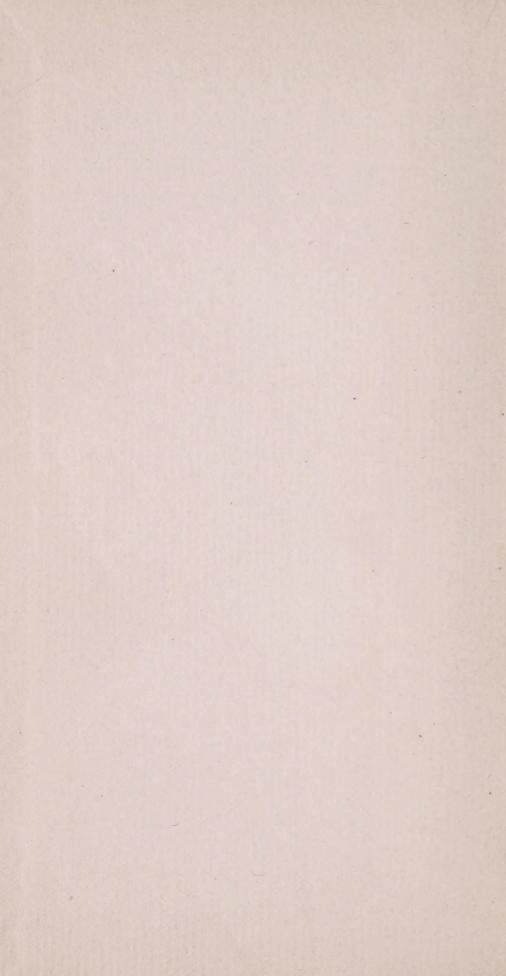
served that the boy had run a good way out, but being unaware of her infirmity, had contented themselves by shouting to her.

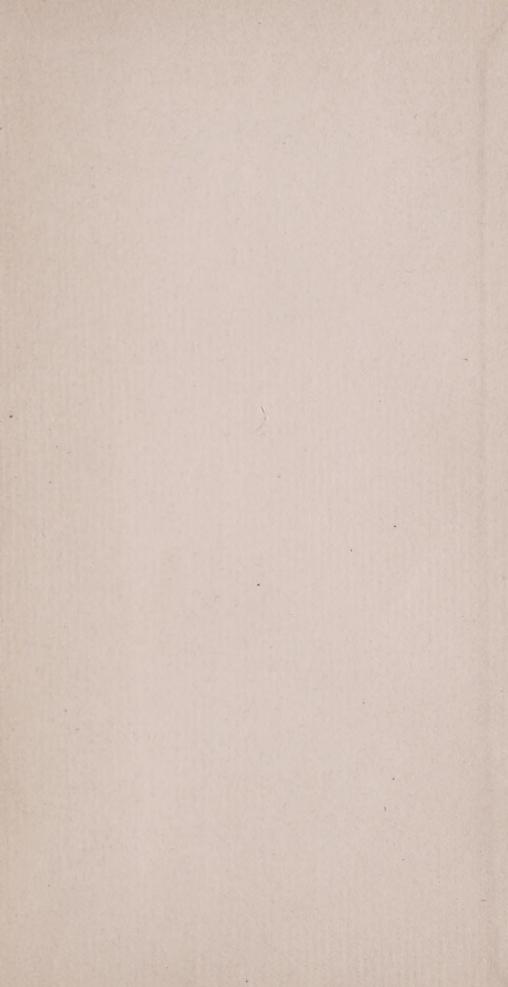
She appears to have looked up only just in time to see him perilously near the water's edge, and in danger of being swept away by the ebbing tide. She rushed to his assistance, and seized and pushed him shorewards without an instant's delay. Then by some unaccountable means she lost her own footing and fell. It may be that the beach was uneven at that particular spot, beaten into ridges perhaps by the storm of the previous night, or that her heavy serge skirt encumbered her; it is impossible to do more than conjecture. But before the astonished boatmen could go to her rescue, a swirling wave gathered round her, and bore her swiftly out of reach in its chill embrace.

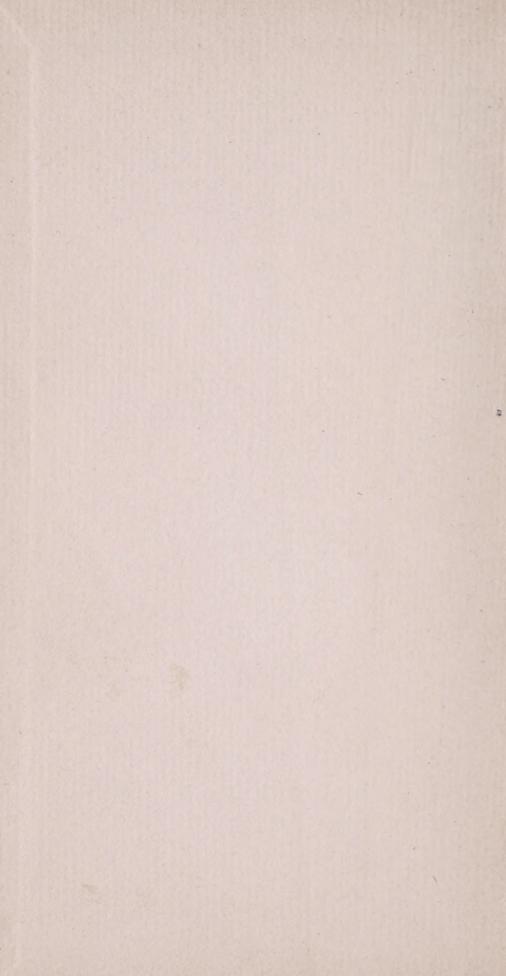
When her body was washed ashore some hours later by the returning tide, an expression of ineffable satisfaction rested upon her features as if her great act of renunciation had purchased peace, and the ears, unstopped at

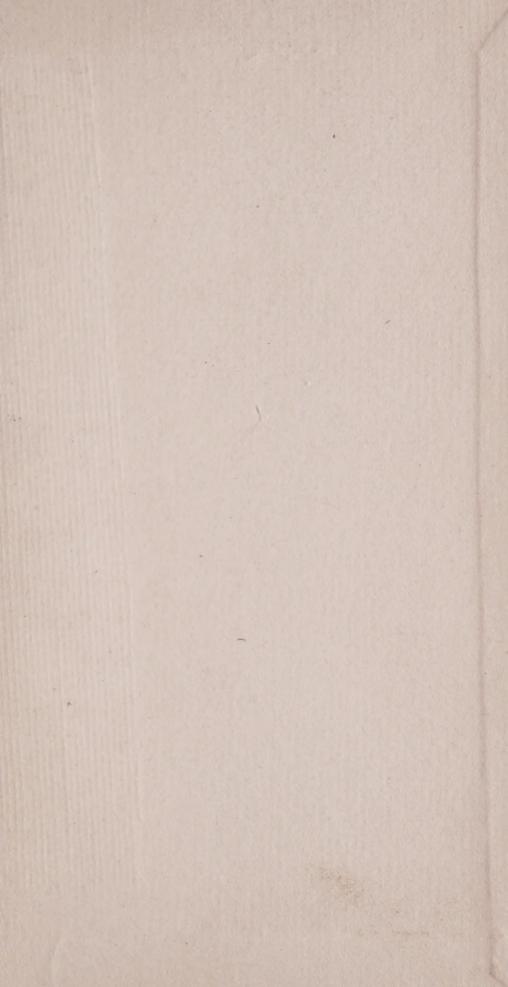
last, had caught the divine harmonies of the celestial city, and the lips, no longer mute, had found utterance in the deep songs of joy which surround the Throne.

THE END.









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